EXODUS BEFORE PARTITION: THE ATTACKS ON MUSLIMS OF BIHAR IN 1946

Dissertation Submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "*Exodus before Partition: The attacks on Muslims of Bihar in 1946* " submitted by **Sharjeel Imam** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university has not been submitted for the award of any degree of this or any other university and is my own work.

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Acknowledgement

I am grateful to my supervisor Indivar Kamtekar for his valuable feedbacks and insights which made me realise my shortcomings, provided new directions and helped me understand my work in a better way.
My colleagues and batchmates have all played a crucial role by giving me their valuable hours in which they listened to and discussed my ideas about this thesis. I was able to finish this thesis despite a recent accident only because of the support of my family and friends who helped put everything together.

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یہ پکار سارے چمن میں تھی وہ سحر ہوی وہ سحر ہوئی
میرے آشیاں سے دھواں اٹھا تو مجھے بھی اسکی خبر ہوئی
(کلیم عاجز)

ye pukar saare chaman mein thi
wo sehr huyee wo sehr huyee
mere aashyaan se dhuaan utha
toh mujhe bhi iski khabar huyi
-kalim ajiz

(the whole garden was shouting that the morning has come
i came to know of it only when my house started burning)

Chapter 1

Introduction

The simultaneous rise of the twin phenomena of nationalism and communalism has been explored by historians of modern South Asia starting from many distinct vantage points. The subsequent partition of the subcontinent has not only coloured both our individual and collective memory, but has also installed tangible roadblocks in the path of a historian aiming to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of these themes. Hence, at the two ends of the historiographical spectrum, we find the nationalist and the separatist view which dictate our search for historical evidence and guide the interpretive processes in opposite directions. A middle path, however, is taken by another set of historians, who claim that the rise of communalism can be attributed to the contests within the domain of elite politics, where arguments over cultural symbols and icons were masqueraded in order to solidify the communitarian identity in order to gain political strength against either imperialism or the rival community.[1]

Besides these diverging perspectives, there exists a further historiographical divide interspersed in these works on 20th century South Asia: on one side, the colonial state, political parties and intellectual activity in a 'public sphere' are seen as primary initiators, and on the other hand, the subaltern perspective, the mass movements and their relation (or the lack of such direct relation) with communalism in the late colonial period.[2] The former type of historical works, such as Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman,* or Venkat Dhulipala's recent w1ork *Creating a New Medina* etc have concentrated more on the all-India level, explaining,

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1 Paul Brass, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism′

2 Examples of the first kind: Venkat Dhulipala's 'Creating a New Medina', Ayesha Jalal's 'The Sole Spokesman';

analyzing or defending the all India formations such as AICC and ML on the basis of all India issues such as devolution of power in various provinces and Urdu-Hindu contest. The works of the latter kind, however, will inevitably concentrate on a region, whether linguistic or provincial, since identifying and excavating the innumerable movements and processes spanning the subcontinent would be well beyond the scope of a single project, partly owing to the great linguistic and regional diversity of this region and partly as a consequence of the partition of the land and the people.[3] These regional narratives such as those emerging from the processes of exploring and documenting late colonial narratives from Punjab, Bengal and UP have complicated our understanding of nationalism and communalism.[4] The religious and cultural movements in these regions, such as cow protection, *shuddhi*, *tabligh* etc can then be understood in the context of the larger socio-economic changes in the region such as agrarian conflict or the increasing involvement in national politics. However, the case of nationalism vis-a-vis communalism in Bihar and the effects of partition on this province, which was a large minority province in British India with many Islamic institutions and a vibrant Urdu press, has been, until recently, under-explored. The recent works of Vinita Damodaran, Papiya Ghosh and Mohammad Sajjad are the ones I will discuss in this essay.

The State-Party Perspective

This section will deal with two works which envision the political parties with their pronouncements and their policies as the primary actors in the narrative of communalism and partition in the last decades of colonial India. Ayesha Jalal's '*The Sole Spokesman*' uses the British archival sources as well, and discusses party politics in Punjab, Bengal, Sindh and UP.

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3 Examples of the latter kind: Gyanendra Pandey, Papiya Ghosh, Vinita Damodaran

4 See Joya Chatterjee, Vazira Zamindar etc

Her main argument is that the uncertain position of Jinnah and Muslim league in Muslim majority provinces on the one hand, and the demands of Muslim minority provinces (UP) on the other, made sure that Jinnah had to keep the idea of Pakistan ambiguous till the very end. The regional formations in Punjab and Bengal, and the political relation of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in these provinces are explored in order to explain that Jinnah was a by-stander to the developments in the provincial parties as well the provincial unit of Muslim League. This perspective is particularly interesting, and needs to be further explored in order to understand the build-up to the 1946 elections. The inhibitions of leaders in Muslim majority provinces especially about the partitioning away of their non-Muslim majority areas was one important irritant between the central and provincial units of ML.[5] Another problem for Jinnah, as mentioned above, is the factionalism as demonstrated by Jalal in her work.

Once these issues have been settled in favor of Jinnah, the focus then shifts to centre and discussions around Simla Conference and after the 1946 election, to the Cabinet mission Plan.[6] It is the conflict over zones as defined in the plan which, as Jalal argues, leads to its breakdown, and Nehru's role is noted in raising this issue, which results in a total withdrawal of ML from the proceedings of the plan.[7] The analysis of regional politics where Congress had a comparatively weaker presence informs our understanding of the political formations in Muslim-majority areas, thereby raising questions about our linear understanding of the road to partition. However, there is little socio-economic context provided to the political changes in these provinces, and the relation these postures and factions had with the larger religious and social movements which were current in those regions. A later work by Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*, deals in detail with the problem of identity formation in 'South

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5 Ayesha Jalal, 'The Sole Spokesman', Chapter 3, Jinnah and the Muslim majority provinces

6 Ayesha Jalal, 'The Sole Spokesman', Chapter 5,6

7 Ayesha Jalal, 'The Sole Spokesman', Chapter 6

Asian Islam', especially in Punjab. It is in this work that the issues of religious and cultural movements, the debates of Urdu-Punjabi (and within Punjabi, *Gurumukhi* and *Shahmukhi*) on one hand, and Urdu-Hindu on the other hand, *shuddhi*, cow protections etc are seen as focal points of the formation of religious or ethnic identities in late colonial India. The role of Urdu press is explored, so it the importance of theological and legal institutions of Muslims. By going extensively through Urdu newspapers of Lahore and other cities of this era, Jalal is able to bring out the reaction to Congress initiatives among the Muslims. She rightly points out that the mass contact program was a 'communal means to a nationalist end', and that it was not received lying down in the Urdu press.[8]

Venkat Dhulipala's '*Creating a New Medina*' is another example of such a work. His work is full of statements by various politicians, religious leaders and colonial authorities, and it is claimed through a reading of this evidence that a section of the Deobandi *ulema* had allied with Jinnah on the condition that the future state be an Islamic state, despite the fact that this term was far from definite for the *ulema* themselves, as Dhulipala points out.[9] To make my point clear, I will talk about the framework and sources of each chapter of the work very briefly. He discusses in one of his chapters the Mass Contact Programme launched by Congress under Nehru to spread the nationalist propaganda to the Muslims in late 1930s. The statements, written or oral, of K M Ashraf and others involved in this programme, as those who were opposed to it, are quoted at length to lay bare the intentions of those Congressmen and anti-ML Muslims who were arguing for the case of *muttahida qaumiyat*, and its opposition by the Muslim League spokesmen.[10] The next chapter is dedicated to the debate around the concept of Pakistan, especially the views of Ambedkar as expressed in his book

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8 Ayesha Jalal, 'Self and Sovereignty', Chapter 7, Between Region and Nation

9 Venkat Dhulipala, 'Creating a New Medina', Introduction

10 Venkat Dhulipala, 'Creating a New Medina', Chapter 2

and other statements. Another chapter is dedicated to the debates around Pakistan and Muslim league in the United Provinces among the politicians, writers and the religious notables.[11] The ulema and their statements for or against Congress or Muslim League are discussed in the fifth chapter, where three critiques of the idea Pakistan are analysed at length.[12] And the sixth chapter named 'Urdu Press, Public Opinion, and Controversies over Pakistan' claims to take note of the larger debate in Urdu press by citing a few cases and one newspaper: Maulana Bazmi's critique of Pakistan, Maulana Amrohwi's defence of Pakistan besides a couple of short defences.[13] To sum it up, '*Creating a New Medina*' is based on a collection of opinions of and arguments forwarded by various notable politicians, scholars and journalists of the subcontinent. However, there are three serious problems with this approach. First and foremost, it is difficult for historians to ascertain meanings or to ascribe definite meanings to the statements of the politicians. Understanding whether it was the intention of Jinnah or not, to partition the subcontinent is not as relevant as understanding the processes which led Muslim League to win the 1946 elections. It is Jinnah's statement after the partition that the Bihar tragedy made Pakistan possible.

To take note of this one statement, and to try to make one consistent framework which analyses what Jinnah said over the last decade of his life would be a difficult as well as an inconsequential project. Secondly, the section of *ulema* in UP which was in support of Pakistan movement, was small, if not insignificant. If they were a powerful engine for Jinnah's ride to power, then the Congress should have done much better given the support it received from mainstream *ulema*. Thirdly, there is no mention of the Hindu or Islamic reform movements, or the devastating communal or ethnic riots in many part of the subcontinent

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11 Venkat Dhulipala, 'Creating a New Medina', Chapter 3,4

12 Venkat Dhulipala, 'Creating a New Medina', Chapter 5

13 Venkat Dhulipala, 'Creating a New Medina', Chapter 6

which would shed some light on the reception of these statements in the wider communities acquainted with Urdu or attached to Deobandi *ulema* or Sufi *pirs*. Another issue with the concerned work is that they reinforce the binary of Congress and Muslim League as the two main beneficiaries of Muslim vote. It might seem from such a projection that the Muslims who were not a part of Muslim League were necessarily pro-congress and were in agreement with Congress' Idea of India. However the situation is not that simple as I have attempted to demonstrate in case of Bihar.

Both these authors have concentrated on an all India level, with special focus to one province (the UP) or multiple provinces (Punjab, Bengal, UP). However, as mentioned above, the case of Bihar, a large minority province has not been explored, and it is sometimes assumed, as Dhulipala does in one of his interviews, that the case of Bihar follows that of UP, both being minority and Urdu-speaking provinces. In addition to that, the issue of communalism is interrogated through the process of identity-formation around religious and cultural idioms in the separate political space provided by the colonial system. Gyanendra Pandey in his famous work on communalism has argued that the construction of communal identities was not a straightforward process of appropriating and producing cultural, religious and literary symbols, but that the socio-economic conditions and dynamics of a community are intimately linked with this process of identity formation.

The Construction of Communalism

Gyanendra Pandey's landmark work '*The Construction of Communalism*', as mentioned above, has sought to explain the processes of identity formation using the various reform movements as well as the caste based mobilisations in late 19th and early 20th century India. His remarkable observation that the word communalism has got its special meaning

from the subcontinent shows that to what an extent our vocabulary is influenced by the way British archivists recorded the corresponding events. He discovers a general pattern to the way riots are narrated in the archival records of the *Bhojpur* region which he explores. The primordial enmity between the Hindu and the Muslim communities is referred to as the main irritant, over which the rational force of British empire is required to maintain peace. The colonial state, while recording the history from this perspective, seeks to legitimise their own role as the inheritors of the Great Mughals, who were responsible before them in maintaining order between these rival communities.[14] Starting from this observation, Pandey explores the stereotype of the bigoted *julaha*, as represented in the colonial archives of the region of study. The onset of British imperialism in this region had resulted in the decline in the income of this class, and a significant portion were forced into agriculture.[15] Pandey shows how a few incidents of strife involving the *julahas* concentrated in one or two districts, which emerged in the context of this rearrangement of economic benefits under the colonial rule, led the colonial administration to paint the image of a bigoted *julaha* in large areas of UP and Bihar.

On the other hand, the late 19th century reform movements, which discouraged heterodox practices, reached the *julahas* as well. According to Pandey, "the assumption that we should perhaps start with is that religion in pre-modern societies is not a surrogate for anything else". The *ziarat* to tombs, the cult of Ghazi Mian, the life cycle rituals of a weaver, and its later literary-religious expression in the form of *Mufid-ul-Momineen*, the rechristening of *julaha* as *momins* or *ansars*: all of these are seen as instances of a community trying to seek its legitimate place in the fold of 'north Indian Muslim' community divided by caste and class. This is seen in parallel with similar developments in backward castes among Hindus, for instance the donning of thread of *Ahirs* or the role of lower castes in the cow-protection

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[14] Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 2

[15] Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 3

movements across North India.[16] In another chapter, through a comparison of two texts, it is attempted to peek into the world of the elite as well as of the lower classes.

The first of these is a late 19th century text '*Waqeat o Hasanat*' written by Sheikh Muhammad Ali Hasan of Mubarakpur in UP, which gives us the perspective of a Muslim belonging to a land-owning class which is going through a period of decline. The loss of political and material strength is reflected in conflicts over cultural and religious symbols. The conflict over issues such as blowing of conch or construction of a new temple or finding of a pig on a tomb, are remembered as critical moments in the history of the *qasba*. Not surprisingly, the other text, a diary maintained by a weaver Abdul Majid, gives significance to things such as the prices of food and raw materials, concerns which do not apparently bother Sheikh Hasan. However, Abdul Majid too talks about the general anger of the Muslim weavers on finding a pig in a mosque, or on seeing Quran being trampled. From a petition from Gorakhpur from as early as 1813, Pandey demonstrates that the weavers 'saw themselves .. as representatives of Muslims at large'.[17] Such investigations can lead us to a better understanding of the reception of religious and cultural symbols across castes and classes. In another chapter, Pandey discussed the Hindu mobilisation in 1917 Shahabad riots, and using archival data, discussed the propaganda prevalent among Hindus during those months. Cow protection emerged as the most important motif of these riots in a large areas of central Bihar.[18] After years of resurgence of cow protection movements, the Baqrid of 1917 led to a massive show of strength by the Hindus. 'Many thousand Hindus streamed into the village of Piru from places all over the district'. In the massive riots which followed, more than 150 villages were looted, and at least 41 killed. The cow protection movement was supported not

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16 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 3

17 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 4

18 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 5

just by the big and petty zamindars or Rajput, Bhumihar and Brahmin castes, but gathered the marginally pure castes in largest numbers.[19] Pandey argues that there was a complex relation between local caste/community identity and that of a wider Hindu/Muslim identity. However, according to him, this is true more for the Hindu communities than the Muslim communities as the former was more widespread and not united by rituals or a church.

The next chapter 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' discusses the cultural symbols of nationalism in North India. On the one hand, the definition of Hinduism is expressed in territorial terms, and on the other, the linguistic movement of Hindi is seen in opposition to the 'Muslim Urdu'. Moreover, nation itself is viewed as a sum of various communities living in it by individuals who were poles apart politically such as Lala Lajpat Rai and Muhammad Iqbal. However, as Pandey argues, it was because of many reasons including the fact that 'India is not coterminous with Islam', and the different trajectories that various Muslim and Hindu communities took in the post-1857 colonial India that the call 'Urdu, Muslim, Hindustan' could not be popularized as easily. The movements of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, for instance, focused on the backwardness of the community in the field western education and government employment. It was felt by Muslims of North India that they had fallen behind Hindus and hence the leaders of Muslims differed with Hindu leaders and among themselves 'over the method and pace of advance towards common nationhood'. Even pro Congress Muslims like Mohammad Ali talk of 'communal individuality' of Indian Muslims as the 'less favored community'.[20]

From such statements, Pandey extracts the earlier perceptions of communalism in the early nationalist phase. Gandhi himself changed his beliefs within the span of a few months, when because of the Mapilla riots, he shifted from 'Musalman-first, everything else

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19 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 5

20 Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 6

afterward' to 'Indians first, Muslims later'. Such pronouncements give us some insights about the earlier understanding of communalism as an integral part of nationalism. As later nationalism under Congress, in the context of 1937 elections, tends to reject communalism altogether, and attempts to see India as a modern nation-state composed of citizens, that the Muslim fears of being a numerical minority are first played out. Given the context of numerous riots and mobilisations around symbols evidently anti-Muslim, even the pro Congress Muslim parties and institutions, in Bihar for instance, are not ready to relinquish the demands of cultural and religious autonomy of the community.[21] Further exploration of the changing definition of communalism at the level of political and intellectual discourse, along with the contradictory role of mobilisation based on anti-Muslim symbols among the masses will provide fresh insight into the emergence and acceptance of ML's rhetoric which rejected Congress and its brand of nationalism vehemently in the 1940s, and argued for an exclusive nationalism based on religious identity.

It would be instructive to discuss Paul Brass's Ethnicities and Nationalism, especially his essay on the formation of South Asian Muslim identity. For Brass, the identity formation of a community are the result of the existence of some old or primordial features or symbols, however they be defined, of a community; symbols which can be used at the right time by the elite to forward their own interests, and to validate their own definition of the community. For the Hindu/Muslim identities, he identifies a few issues such as cow protection, Hindi-Urdu issue, the *Shariah* factor etc. However, his analysis fails to treat these issues in a historic way, and show how they came to be such important issues. Moreover, Brass' thesis fails to explain the massive mobilization of lower castes in cow protection agitations as well as the communal riots. The latter do not figure as important historical points in his narrative.

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[21] Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Construction of Communalism', Chapter 7

The multi-layered diversity of caste and classes in both religious groups, and heterodox nature of many communities is ignored, and the analysis is reduced to the two groups of elites and non-elites. He identifies three kinds of elites among Muslims of early 20th century: the landlords, the secular progressives and the *ulema*. These three classes have their own interests and their own vocabularies through which they tend to define the Muslim community and their interests. Their definitions might be very superficial, and the core they are trying to identify might be very flimsy, for instance the core of Islamic solidarity that Muslim League achieved was to be destroyed in three decades after partition. However, Brass fails to discuss the context in which this ephemeral solidarity was achieved by ML, as Pandey does in the last chapter of his work, where he discusses the relation between nationalism and communalism.

Similarly, the great debates within the North Indian *ulema* as well as the middle class Muslims within the Urdu press points towards a far from homogeneous group of elites who were busy masquerading cultural symbols at the right time to advance their interests. More importantly, the role of communal riots has not been acknowledged by Brass, a theme which Pandey dwells on in his work at length. To such an extent has this elite/non-elite framework coloured Brass' reading of the evidence that he claims that 'Muslim political elites in India in 19th and 20th centuries attempted to argue that the Muslims of the subcontinent formed a distinct nation, and they had a grand, but ephemeral success'.[22]

However, at no point in these two centuries can this be shown to be the opinion of the majority of Muslim elites. It is clear from Pandey's work that there was a notion of positive communalism right from Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to Mohammad Iqbal, and that this seems to be the mainstream elite opinion given the current analysis of published sources.

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22 Paul Brass, 'Ethnicity and Nationalism', Chapter 3

The Case of Bihar

I will discuss works which address the first concerned raised above in the section on all-India/state-party narratives, which is related to incorporating Bihar's story in this larger story partition. Vinita Damodaran's book on Congress in Bihar in the last decade of colonial rule 'Broken Promises' provides us with an entry point into late-colonial Bihar. She discusses the role and activities of various internal factions of Bihar Congress from the 1937 election till the eve of partition. Basing the work on the the colonial government archives, statements of Congress leaders, their autobiographies and various newspapers and many secondary sources, she is able to paint a dynamic picture of Bihari countryside in the last decade of colonial rule. The Congress takeover of ministries in 1937 is seen as a watershed in the history of the party, as after that it became a ruling force instead of a movement, and the populist propaganda of Congress was put to test. However, the popular demands lead to mass unrest and movements throughout the province, but more importantly in the central region which later is the site of the infamous Bihar riots.

The rise of Kisan Sabhas, allied to Congress, but extremely critical of its administration, is the main example of such movements. The use of coercive tools of the state by the right wing faction which is in charge of the local Congress party to suppress various movements within and without the party are amply demonstrated by Damodaran. According to her, in the context of inflation and black-marketeering of basic items, this suppression leads to a shrinking in support base of the Congress party, especially of the old guard, since the radical factions had still maintained a link, however tenuous, with the mother party.[23] After the old guard is put in jail in the context of World War and Quit India movement, the left wing of the party gets a free rein to use Congress' name for their radical programme. She traces a

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23 Vinita Damodaran, 'Broken Promises', Chapter 2

manifold increase in dacoities and thefts in the 1942-45 period, where the lower castes are organising themselves and attacking and looting not only the government institutions but big and petty zamindars as well. These attacks, she argues, even if not completely under Congress' control, had a level of co-operation and association with the left-wing as well the Azad Dastas that proliferated across the province. She is able to locate examples of Hindu-Muslim unity against the zamindars in various places, for instance Munghyr. However, the release of Gandhi and slowly the other Congress leaders by Wavell is to be seen in the context of rising radicalism in Congress, which is to be checked by the old guard. The statements of Gandhi and Rajendra Prasad immediately after their release in which they distance themselves from the violent ways, is seen as an example of the proximity between the line of thinking of Congress, the colonial administrators and the important zamindars of the region. [24]

This is the context of the riots of 1946, which happened a few months after the election. There is a perceptible relation between the worsening economic situation of the peasants, and their radicalization and the agrarian unrest. This explains why, according to Damodaran, many of the attackers were motivated solely by the intention to loot. But then, as she herself asks, what led the Hindu peasants who had formed a joint front with the Muslim peasants and weavers against the zamindars a few years back, to attack and exterminate their neighbours.[25] More importantly, what led to the polarisation of 1946 elections in Bihar, given the fact that Muslim League did not win any seats in 1937 and that the Momin Conference allied with Congress was able to win 5 seats even in the 1946 elections. In addition to this, what explains the massive size of the mob, sometimes beyond 50,000, which raided Muslim villages and *tolas* in those months, how is this to be seen in the context of Bakasht struggles against the zamindars, and the radicalization of the peasants. She suggests that it would be too

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24 Vinita Damodaran, 'Broken Promises', Chapter 4-5

25 Vinita Damodaran, 'Broken Promises', Chapter 6

simplistic to reduce this to machinations of zamindars to divert the unrest to communal channels, even if this process does contribute to it. The other aspects to be explored, therefore, are i) the transformation of communal identity of the peasants by 1940s, in their attempts to achieve ritual superiority and upward mobility, ii) the communal riots which puncture the history of this transformation, and iii) the changing relation of communalism and nationalism, from nation as a sum of the communities residing in it, to the nation as a collection of citizens. The time frame of Damodaran's work is limited and hence a full exploration of the debates of identity formation cannot be expected of it. She provides us with the developments on the Congress' side, and its internal problems vis-a-vis the multi-layered peasant struggles.

Papiya Ghosh's collected essays in '*Community and Nation*' discuss the issues of identity and politics in late colonial Bihar. She uses Gyanendra Pandey's framework on communalism, as well as various newspapers, publications, and archival sources of the time to provide us with the context of identity-formation of Muslims and Hindus in colonial Bihar. One one level, the divide between the *sharif* and *razil* Muslims and its political consequence in the shape of pro and anti Muslim League formations is pointed out.[26] However, her more important essays focus on the riots of 1917, the Congress rule of 1937-9 as well as the riots of 1946 and the latter period which is when what she calls the Congress Muslim stereotype is formed in Bihar, as the Muslim associated with Congress is increasingly seen as a traitor to the 'Muslim' cause.[27] The case of Mazharul Haq chairing the All India Cow Conference in Patna in 1920 is one example, and the silence of Syed Mahmud on discrimination against Muslims another. However, what is to be noted it that this did not directly lead to swelling of ML's membership, as there were rival Muslim political formations such as MIP, MUP and Momin Conference which received Muslim votes in 1937, and maintained, at least initially, a

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26 Papiya Ghosh, 'Community and Nation', *Colonial 'Muslim' Politics in Bihar*

27 Papiya Ghosh, 'Community and Nation', Chapter 2,3,4

friendly posture vis-a-vis Congress party. One the other level, she argues that the idiom of cultural autonomy forms an important part of the pro-Congress Muslim parties as well, even in the last decade of colonial rule.

It is in this context that Pandey's work on the Shahabad riots as well as the changing relation of communalism and nationalism in Congress rhetoric must be taken note of. Ghosh's analysis of 1917 Shahabad riots, in which cow protection was one of the main rallying cries, goes to show that how the *sharif-razil* divide was bypassed both in the rhetoric condemning the riots and by the massacre and uprooting of Muslims by large mobs of Hindus. For instance, Ghosh mentions the Muslim *coolies* working in Calcutta returning to their home districts on the call of their zamindars to defend their homes in case of further rioting. By 1920s, it was becoming increasingly difficult to disentangle religious, community and political activism, and it is the 'texture of this intermeshing .. that awaits more extensive detailing'.[28]

The role of Imarat-i-Shairah and its expressions of *muttahida qaumiyyat* is presented in detail in one of her essays. Using the publications of this institution, and by pointing to its support base in the various *khanqahs*, and the success achieved by the political party it floated in 1937 elections, she is able to demonstrate the distinct opinions of Congress and the proponents of *muttahida qaumiyyat* vis-a-vis communitarian rights and safeguards. The Imarat, although opposed to the divisive propaganda of Muslim league, floated a denominational political party Muslim Independent Party (MIP) and is successful in securing many seats in the legislature.[29] The shift from MIP to ML in 1946 should be seen in this context of different interpretations of nationalism by Congress and Muslim parties against partition. These Muslim parties were not in complete agreement with congress on a number of

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[28] Papiya Ghosh, 'Community and Nation', *Community Questions and Bihar Politics*

[29] Papiya Ghosh, 'Community and Nation', *Muttahida qaumiyyat in aqalliat Bihar*

issues and hence should not be seen as congress surrogates. The distinct nature of Muslim league stems not from the fact that it is a Muslim communal organisation, but from the fact that it is most staunchly opposed to Congress' notion of nationalism, and given the branding of Congress rule as the Hindu rule, the ML was able to further the issues of cultural and religious autonomy of Muslims in Bihar, which was violated by the majority community on a number of occasions, some of them culminating into riots of 1939, 1941-2 etc.[30] It was ML which articulated the community rights most vigorously in Bihar after 1937, and exploration of this theme would be more helpful in understanding ML's success in 1946.

In another important essay, Ghosh discusses the riots of 1946, and the major upheavals that it caused in the Magadh region. Although the Congress government imposed strict censorship on reporting of the riots, she creates the narrative of the riots using whatever evidence is available through the newspapers, colonial reports and the reports of the political parties. She argues that the riots of 1946 left an indelible mark on the Bihari society, and crystallised the communal identity further. It led to massive migration our of Bihar which has led to the issue of Bihari Muslim diaspora and its role in the nation-making processes of South Asia, which she deals in a later work. Unlike the analysis of Damodaran, which does not take the larger context of identity formation into account, Ghosh's collection includes issues of identity focused around cow-protection, *shuddhi* etc into her analysis. However, I expect that delving deeper into the Urdu and Hindi memoirs and publications of those decades will add many layers to our understanding of these processes and the reception of the various political vocabularies among the literate classes. In addition to this, the transformation of the religious terrain from pre-partition to post-partition Bihar by locating the internal migrants and their destination within Bihar will also be helpful in shedding light on the experience of

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30 Papiya Ghosh, 'Community and Nation', *Articulating Community Rights*

the riots as faced by various Muslim communities through the frame of their caste/class status.

Mohammad Sajjad's '*Muslim Politics in Bihar*' is the latest work in exploring the socio-political context of Muslims in 1940s and beyond. He is exceptional in his extensive use of Urdu sources, and factoring in the innumerable memoirs and statements left by the Muslim leaders and literary figures of Bihar in these decades. It explores the sense of loss of prestige of Muslims both within Congress and in the bureaucratic circles during the first half of twentieth century, given the role that Muslims thought they played in the separation of Bihar from Bengal in 1911. Sajjad discusses in details various political formations among Muslims before the last decade when ML is able to seize power. The Imarat-i-Shariah, the Momin Conference, the MIP etc are discussed in details, and their diverse social bases are also pointed out.[31] He argues that there were no separatist leaders to speak of in Bihar till very late, and that is what explains absence of ML in 1937 elections.

However, the polarising texture of the politics of late 1930s especially under Congress' rule, and the issues of discrimination against the religious and cultural rights of Muslims that Muslim league got a chance to enter Bihar, and that the Congress Muslims lost their credibility. The humiliation of the stalwart Muslim leaders of Congress such as Syed Mahmud, Shah Omair etc, are seen as important episodes, which are used by the anti-Congress propagandist. Further, Sajjad talks in detail about the 1946 riots and the mass exodus of Muslims from Bihar, and explores this aspect in terms of archival evidence and personal memoirs. He along with Ghosh point out the provincial Muslim League's demands of partitioning Bihar or at least creating pockets of strong Muslim population.[32] A demand of this sort coming from Bihar Provincial Muslim League as late as January 1947 should definitely

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31 Mohammad Sajjad, 'Muslim Politics in Bihar', Chapter 1

32 Mohammad Sajjad, 'Muslim Politics in Bihar', Chapter 3

complicate the linear narratives of Muslim League's demands for creation of Pakistan. In another chapter, he isolates the arguments provided by Muslims leaders and writers of Bihar against the two-nation theory, and the contrast between the rhetoric of central and the provincial units of ML till the riots of late 1946. Where Sajjad goes beyond this, is the analysis of post-partition Bihar, and the struggles for the rights of a much more enfeebled minority over the issues of political empowerment, and the preservation of Urdu language. [33]

Source Survey

The sources I have gone through can be divided into three broad categories. First is the set of official records, maintained in the National Archives in New Delhi and Bihar State Archives in Patna. They include reports from commissions set up to inquire various incidents of violent communal conflicts in Bihar in 1946-47. These reports are extensive and contain the reports sent in by the local administrators to their higher officials, in and after the days of the attacks. The papers concern not only immediate issues such as the nature of the pogroms, sites of firing by police and military, or the negligence shown by certain policemen during the pogroms, but discuss censorship and rehabilitation also. Besides these reports, the Legislative Assembly and Council debates are the other source of official records. The interesting question-answer rounds in the house, where ML is the chief opposition party provide us with many answers which the opposition ekes out from the government, for instance the number of persons arrested or convicted after the attacks. Then there are village directories which were published by postal department in 1880s, which provide us with one reference point, the other being censuses in post colonial India, which provide a complete list

[33] Mohammad Sajjad, 'Muslim Politics in Bihar', Chapter 5

of villages in the province. Such comparisons have helped me point out the villages which have disappeared or become uninhabited between these periods.

The second source base is of 8 newspapers and one journal in three languages; English:4 Hindi:1 and Urdu:4, which were published in Delhi, Lucknow, Dariyabad, Patna, Calcutta and Bombay. I accessed these newspapers in four archives: Nehru Memorial Library in New Delhi, Khudabaksh Oriental Library in Patna, Imarat i Shariah Library in Patna and National Library in Kolkata. I have divided the newspapers according to three variables: region, language, and political/religious affiliation of the publishers. Their editorial policies reflect their ideological leanings, which are underpinned by the three categories mentioned above. It is also reflected in the way in which some news are highlighted, while others silenced. Another relevant dimension of quotes: exploring what is quoted by whom in which newspaper. Sardar Patel of Sidq is different from Sardar Patel of Searchlight. Searchlight from Patna, and Times of India from Mumbai are the regional and national newspapers sympathetic to Congress. Star of India from Calcutta, and Dawn from Delhi are the ML equivalent of these two newspapers. The Hindi newspaper Aaj was published from Benares, and covers the Bengal and Bihar riots, and was read by thousands of Bihari Hindi speakers. The 3 Urdu newspapers Naqeeb, Sidq and Zulqarnain are from Patna, Daryabad and Lucknow, while the journal Nadeem is from Patna. The paucity of coverage of the riots in Bihar reflects the strict censorship imposed by the Congress government.

The third source base comprises the numerous autobiographies and memoirs left by individuals who were actively involved in these events, or describe the circumstances before and after these events. These autobiographies and memoirs have been supplanted by a number of biographies of these figures and other politicians. Currently I have gone through the memoirs, reports or autobiographies of Kalim Ajiz, Wahab Ashrafi, Sayid Fakhri, Ata Kakwi, Sheen Muzaffarpuri, Sayyid Abdul Aziz, Qudratullah Shahab, Rajendra Prasad, Manu

Gandhi, Taqi Rahim and Shah Muhammad Usman. The relevant part for me has been the instances where there memoirs touch upon the issue of pogroms in Bihar, or the calamities of partition in general. Kalim Ajiz represents the voice of the victim whose whole village Telhara had been destroyed in the pogroms, while Wahab Ashrafi from Bibipur, Sayid Fakhri from the large settlement of Kako represent the survivors, whose villages were attacked but survived. One of them, however, migrated to Karachi with his family. Ata Kakwi provides me with an insight into the demographics and society of pre-pogrom settlement of Kako. Sheen Muzaffarpuri belongs to north Bihar, where rural attacks did not happen outside of Saran district, hence his autobiography is relevant in describing the relative peace in Muzaffarpur and his region. Sayyid Abdul Aziz, an important ML politician in late colonial Bihar, came out with his small report just after the pogroms.

Qudratullah Shahab provides an interesting perspective because he is a Muslim ICS officer posted in south Bihar in these days, and hence is a witness to the pogroms from the administrative side. His account informs us about the intricate linkages between administration, industrial/commercial activities and peasant politics in the context of communal riots. Manu Gandhi accompanied Gandhi in his trip to Bihar two months after the pogroms, and she provides us with a map of Gandhi's trip in Magadh, and key names of the villages and settlements which were destroyed. Taqi Rahim, a historian in his own write, dedicates a section in his history of Magadh Muslims to the communal pogroms which he witnessed first hand. Lastly, Muhammad Usman, attached with Imarat e Shariah records many instances of communal conflict and subsequent litigation, some of them originating from the pogroms of 1946, in which Imarat i Shariah was a party to the Muslim cause.

Chapter Scheme

This research work is divided into three three parts which is Introduction, three chapters on research done and a conclusion.

The introduction part contains a survey of existing literature, and the major ideas in the field of communal riots and the history of late colonial Bihar. The survey of primary sources is also done for this paper as a part of the introduction.

The second part of the thesis containing three chapters deals with the attack on muslims of Bihar in 1946, its consequences in the form of displacement, migration and refugee crisis, and the role played by the State, political parties and the press. The first chapter uses archival sources and autobiographical accounts left by the muslim victims to understand the context, the pattern and the scale of attacks. While providing the context of 1946 election, it is noted that the Muslim parties contesting the election should not be seen as congress surrogates, as many of their demands regarding minority rights such as separate electorates were different from demands of congress. On the other hand, the 'Nationalist Muslims' specially Imarat-e-Shariah used sectarian language and policy to discredit Muslim League and its politics. This chapter attempts to map the regions which suffered the attacks with large casualties. Three cases of Benibad, Kako, and Telhara are discussed based on Urdu sources where the attack is described from the victim's perspective.

The second chapter of part two focuses on the reaction of the state to the attacks and the subsequent refugee crisis. This chapter is based on archival sources and newspaper reports. I have attempted to analyse the response of state to the attacks through the working of the police and the army which was posted in response to the disturbance of law and order situation and the attacks on Muslims. In the latter half of the chapter, I try to delineate the massive refugee and evacuee crisis as it unfolded in November-December 1946. The role

played by the provincial administration led by congress is also analysed using statements and official orders, notifications and regulations.

In the third and final chapter I discuss the role played by the media during the violent months of August, September, October and November. I use the news reports of the seven newspapers of three languages to analyse their coverage of the Great Calcutta killings, the Noakhali riots and the Bihar massacre. There are two perspectives reflected in the coverage of the Calcutta killings where the 'nationalist newspapers', Hindu as well as Muslim, were critical of the Bengal administration and Muslim League while the 'anti-nationalist newspapers' sought to shift the blame to the nationalists. However, this clearcut divide was blurred after the Noakhali riots as the 'Hindu Nationalists' took an increasingly anti-muslim position and indulged in exaggerated coverage while the 'Muslim Nationalists' expressed their surprise at such coverage and tried to moderate the situation. The rift between these two camps gets completely apparent after the Bihar killings where the 'Hindu Nationalists' attempt to portray it as Hindu-Muslim riot while the 'Muslim Nationalist' describe it as one sided planned massacre of Muslims. The difference of opinion between the Anti-Muslim League Muslims and the pro-Muslim League Muslims got reduced as a consequence of the killings of Muslims in Bihar. Except for the larger question of partition, they seemed united on the issues of Muslims in Bihar.

CHAPTER 2

Mapping the Bihar Carnage

Introduction

This chapter looks into the context in which the communal attacks of 1946 took place in the province of Bihar. Two aspects of the attack are discussed in the first part of the chapter, political and geographical. The elections of 1946 and the increasing polarisation along religious lines constitute the political context of the attacks in Bihar. Similarly the geographical divisions of Bihar which reflect its linguistic and religious diversity as well provide us with another frame for locating the attacks.

In the second half of the chapter, an attempt is made to map the attacks using the archival sources. This analysis reveals that the five most affected districts were Patna, Monghyr, Saran, Bhagalpur and Gaya. The chronology of attacks is also reflected in this chapter where the Saran was attacked the earliest and then the attacks moved to South of Bihar. The official estimate of casualties and affected population from various districts are also presented in this chapter.

Bihar in the late Colonial Times

The province of Bihar was carved out of Bengal in 1912 after an unsuccessful attempt by the British to divide Greater-Bengal along religious lines. Many classes among Hindus and Muslims of this region took part in the anti-Bengali struggle which resulted in the formation of Bihar.[34] It was a province comprising many disparate regions having diverse

[34] Mohammad Sajjad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, pg. 60

linguistic and geographical regions. The three main divisions of the province were the following: The plain North of Ganges, the plain South of Ganges and a significant chunk of the mineral-rich C*hhota-Nagpur* plateau. In this thesis I will be focussing on the first two divisions which comprise modern Bihar after the separation of Jharkhand, especially because the attacks on Muslims happened mostly in the Gangetic plains. Even in these two broad regions there are natural subdivisions defined mainly by the criss-crossing of rivers in these fertile plains. For instance the Son river divides the southern plain into two, west of which lies the Bhojpur region (then Shahabad district).

Similarly the northern Bihar plain is divided by many rivers Gandak in the west being one of the major ones. The wider of the rivers are relevant because transportation of people and goods across them would be expensive and limited compared to smaller rivers and thinner streams where bridges were possible in pre-modern times. On the other hand the greater rivers function as linguistic borders as well, for instance the dialect spoken west of Son is Bhojpuri while in the east Magahi is spoken. Similarly, in North Bihar as we move east of Gandak Bhojpuri diminishes and Maithili becomes more dominant.[35]

The region which witnessed most amount of violence in the 1946 attacks is Magadh. Magadh has been at the centre stage of Indian history since the later Vedic period. Bounded by Son river on west, and Ganga on north, and by forest and hills of the Chhotanagpur plateau along south and south east, this well-protected region provided the base for the first empires in the history of the subcontinent. It's ancient capital was Rajgir in the interior of Magadh surrounded by many hills. As the kingdom turned into an empire, the capital was shifted to Patliputra (modern day Patna) which lies on the southern edge of the Ganges river, just east of its junction with Son river. Islam arrived in Magadh in 13th century

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35 G A Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, 1927

with the excursions of Turkish and Afghan generals into the eastern part of the subcontinent.[36]

For centuries after that the province was governed from a military cantonment close to Rajgir named Bihar Sharif (in modern day Nalanda district). The suffix *Sharif* denotes that this town emerged as a major Sufi centre besides being the administrative headquarters, and the modern province of Bihar takes its name from this town.[37] It also contains the Bhojpuri speaking parts west of Son and Gandak on both sides of Ganges, and the Mithila region as well which comprises of the region between Gandak and Bengal border. The Ganga river reaches its maximum width after Son and Gandak join it just before Patna, and hence one of the widest rivers separates Mithila from Magadh. As it enters Bengal, the river divides into many parts. The plans to build a bridge on Ganges to connect north to south was discussed as early as 1870s, but the actual construction could take place in 1980s, when an 8 km long road bridge was made over Ganges. This fact shows that the disconnect between Mithila and Magadh, ie between north and South Bihar is one of the longest continuities of subcontinental history.[38]

The Muslim population of Bihar stood at around 13-14% according to the 1941 census but it was divided unevenly across these different regions. Patna, Gaya and Monghyr district which constitutes the Magadh region had a Muslim population of around 10%. The western Bhojpuri speaking region comprising of districts of Shahabad and Saran also had a Muslim population of 10%. The North Bihar division of Tirhut excluding its Bhojpuri speaking Saran district had around 15% Muslims.[39] The Eastern edge of Bihar comprising of Purnia and Bhagalpur districts had the largest concentration of Muslims which constituted

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36 Faseehuddin Balkhi, Tareekh e Magadh, Pg. 95

37 Faseehuddin Balkhi, Tareekh e Magadh, Pg. 86

38 Arvind Das, Republic of Bihar, Pg.

39 Census of India, 1941

more than a quarter of the population of the region. Besides the general population distribution mentioned above, there is an urban-rural divide among the Muslim population as well. In 1941 in the three divisions which comprise Bihar now, the urban population was 25% Muslim. However, if we look at the internal level of urbanisation among Muslims of these regions, a different picture emerges. Not more than 5% of Muslims in North Bihar were urbanised, on the other hand 20% of Muslims in South Bihar were living in towns and cities.[40] Since the Muslim population of South Bihar was smaller when compared to North Bihar, and Muslims of South Bihar were heavily urbanised, it can be inferred that the rural population of Muslims in South Bihar was extremely small ranging from 5-10%. The attacks in Muslims in 1946 were carried out primarily in Saran district and the 4 districts of South Bihar (Patna, Gaya, Monghyr, Bhagalpur). Villages in the districts of Patna, Gaya and Monghyr were attacked, on the other hand in Bhagalpur Muslims were attacked primarily in the town. Hence it is relevant to keep the linguistic and geographical boundaries of these regions in mind when studying such large scale attacks.

The Immediate Context

The Elections

In 1935 the Government of India Act was passed by the British empire according to which nationwide elections were to be held based on limited franchise and representative governments were to be sworn in the provinces of British India. The elections were held in 1937 and dozens of parties contested across the subcontinent. There was a complicated arrangement of reservation in separate electorates through which Hindus, Muslims, Tribals and the depressed and labour classes were represented in the legislative assembly. Although

[40] ibid

the cabinet was responsible to the elected house the British governor could still exercise *veto* and stall the plans of the elected government. In Bihar the legislative assembly had a total of 152 seats out of which 98 were general and scheduled caste seats won mostly by Congress. Besides there were 11 special constituencies, 3 tribal constituencies and 40 constituencies reserved for Muslims, although Muslims comprised only 13% of the province. What was significant was that Congress which won almost all general and scheduled caste seats often without opposition, failed to perform in the seats reserved for Muslims. It could win only 4 Muslim seats, that too with backing from MIP, while another Muslim congressman was returned from a special constituency. The remaining 36 seats were split among three main parties, Muslim Independent Party(MIP), Ahrar Party, Muslim United Party (MUP) and many independent candidates. The MIP emerged as the strongest party with 20 out of 40 Muslim seats, while MUP won 5, the Ahrars 3 and 6 independent candidates also won. Significantly, the Muslim League(ML) failed to win any seat in Bihar in contrast to Bengal and UP where it fared better.[41]

The MIP was floated by Imarat-e-Shariah, Phulwari which was the most significant theological institution of Muslims in Bihar (and now Jharkhand as well) and Odisha.[42] [two lines on imarat]. The decision making authority in the party was largely in the hands of Amir-e-Imarat. A British educated Barrister from Patna district Mohammad Yunus Mallick was elected as the leader of MIP legislators in a ceremony conducted at the headquarters of Imarat-e-Sahriah in Phulwari under the guidance of Amir-e-Shariyat Maulana Sajjad himself.[43] In the context of stalled negotiations between the Congress majority and the government, MIP was asked to form the government and Barrister Yunus was sworn in as the

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[41] Taqi Rahim, Mohammad Yunus: Bihar ke pehle Mukhyamantri

[42] Mohammad Sajjad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, pg. 74-75

[43] Taqi Rahim, Mohammad Yunus: Bihar ke pehle Mukhyamantri

first Prime Minister of Bihar under the Government of India Act.[44] However he had to resign after two months as the Congress party was ready to form a ministry backed by its majority in the house. The Congress cabinet had 4 Muslim members, however none of these 3 Muslim parties was invited for a coalition.[45] Over the next two years SK Sinha, famously known as *SK Babu,* served as the Prime Minister of Bihar while the opposition comprised largely of Muslims. It has been argued by many historians that these two years of Congress rule led to increasing disillusionment of Congress party among the Muslims.[46] The case in Bihar was no different as the Muslim minority felt under-represented and forever relegated to playing an oppositional role.

It was also argued by many contemporary Muslims that the coming in power of Congress has made Hindu communalists more aggressive as they consider Congress to be their own party and hence attack Muslims with impunity. With the onset of the second World War, the Indian government committed itself to the war effort without taking Congress into confidence. In protest the Congress ministry across British India resigned and so did the Bihar Congress Ministry. Jinnah and Muslim League celebrated this day as the day of deliverance for the Muslims of India, as they were free of the oppressive rule of the Congress government.

The War Years

During the war years increasing inflation led to rising prices of food and subsequently massive hunger crisis in Bihar and Bengal. Inflation of food prices affects the lowest classes which buy their food and are susceptible to the fluctuations in the food market.

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44 Mohammad Sajjad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, pg. 124-125

45 Mohammad Sajjad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, pg. 124-125

46 See Mohammad Sajjad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, Chapter 2; and *Ghosh, Papiya,* 'The Making of the Congress Muslim Stereotype: Bihar, 1937-39,'

This hunger crisis led to death of thousands of individuals across Bihar and Bengal. Furthermore, it intensified the agrarian struggle, whether in the form of organised protest against the landlords or in the form of common crime such as dacoity, robbery etc. The main classes with respect to landownership were: 1. landlords 2. tenants and 3. landless labourers.

All three comprised of large chunks of Bihari society as there were at least 1.2 million registered landlords in a population of around 40 million.[47] If the dependents are also counted the landlord class alone would account for around 13% of the population of Bihar. Zamindars of all variety existed holding from a few *bighas* of land to a few thousand *bighas*. On the other hand the tenant classes were the single largest class and the some of the largest tenants were as prosperous as the smallest zamindars. At the bottom lied the landless class which would often provide bonded labour to the classes above. The Congress's rhetoric of zamindari abolition and popular movements such as Swami Sahajanand's All India Kisan Sabha agitation led to an increased reaction against oppressive zamindari practices.[48]

One such account is provided by Qudratullah Shahab, an ICS officer posted in Bhagalpur, Bihar. In Nathnagar subdivision, Bhagalpur, where he was posted during protests by peasants against land appropriation for a factory by a leading industrialist who was also a Hindu Mahasabha leader. Shahab noticed that Muslims were leaving the town one by one during the protests. On further enquiry he found out from the Muslims that whenever there is a conflict between the peasants and industrialists, a communal attack by the mob takes place on Muslims, after which curfew is enforced, and the construction of the factory begins. Surprised at this discovery, he startsed investigating, and found a similar pattern for last few years in places where such land appropriation was happening. He informed his seniors, and presented a report in front of them, however in stead of further enquiry, Shahab was

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[47] Bihar Abolition of Zamindari Bill 1947, Examination of the Financial Implications, 1948, NAI

[48] Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises, Chapter 5

transferred. His forecast, however proved to be true, as Nathnagar witnessed riots after a few days, in which Muslims were attacked and killed.[49] It has also been argued by historians such as Vinita Damodaran that often these agrarian conflicts took communal colour where the fury of the peasant mob could be easily directed against the Muslim minority.[50]

Hindu Mahasabha

Right wing Hindu organisations such as RSS and Hindu Mahasabha were also active in Bihar. By 1944, 17 district units has been established in Bihar. The largest number of delegates came from the districts of Munghyr, Bhagalpur, Patna, Darbhanga, Saaran and Gaya.[51] Together, these districts accounted for almost half of all the delegates of provincial Hindi Mahasabha. All of these districts excluding Darbhanga witnessed the maximum violence against Muslims in October-November 1946. In 1946 a Hindu Raksha Dal was planned which was later overtaken by Hindu Rashtra Raksha Dal. The purpose of this Raksha Dal (literally, defence force) was to defend the "cause of Hindu Nation, Hindu *Jati*, Hindu faith and Hindu culture". According to a self assessment of Hindu Mahasabha their major achievements included saving Hindu girls from goondas, protesting against Hindu Code Bill and protesting against cow slaughter.[52] Women and cows were the two major symbols of anti-Muslim propaganda in late-colonial Bihar.

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[49] Qudratullah Shahab, Shahabnama, p. 109-126

[50] Vinita Damodaran, Broken Promises, Chapter 6

[51] Bihar Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Papers, 1944, NAI

[52] Bihar Provincial Hindu Mahasabha Papers, 1946, NAI

Elections of 1946

By 1946 Jinnah had been able to convince the Muslim electorate that if they did not unite in the face of Hindu Congress, the British would leave transferring power into their hands. Hence in the 1946 provincial elections ML defeated every other political force in the Muslim electorate. The Muslims allied to Congress lost everywhere except in the north-western frontier provinces. In Bihar, like other provinces with Hindu population, Congress like the last elections won almost all the General and SC reserved seats. But significantly, ML which could not open its account in 1937, won 34 out of the 40 seats. 5 seats were won by Momin conference which was a party of backward Muslim communities allied to Congress and were against partition.[53] However, Jinnah's victory was complete and Congress and its Muslim allies lost miserably in the Muslim seats of Bihar. The Congress formed the government while the ML sat in the opposition and Jinnah's prophecy was fulfilled that Congress would never share power with the minorities. Congress once again assumed power in Bihar and according to the Muslim newspapers and politicians, the Hindu communalists started acting in a more belligerent manner.[54] It was also argued that the British had been more successful in controlling and preventing riots against Muslims. The electoral polarisation was complete and the stage was set for violent conflict between the majority and the minority communities.

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53 *Times of India,* 26 March, 1946

54 *Naqeeb*, 20 July, 1946

The Start of Violence

The confessional victories of Congress and ML led to triangular negotiations for the transfer of power among the British and these two parties. The communal polarisation during the elections was further intensified because of the competitive rhetoric of Congress and ML with respect the constitutional arrangement of independent India. *Akhand Bharat* and *Pakistan* became the keywords which were rallying cries for these two opposing camps. The disagreements during the Cabinet Mission Plan negotiations of May and June 1946 led to aggravation of hostilities between these two camps.

The number of communal riots also increased in such polarised atmosphere. Although communal riots in Bihar were a recurrent phenomenon since at least early 20th century as the most massive attacks on Muslims happened in 1917 during Baqrid under the pretext of cow protection.[55] Beside cow protection, Hindu women marrying Muslim men was another major grievance cited by the Hindu mob attacking the Muslim minorities. This excuse for attacking Muslims was as old as cow protectionism itself. In June 1946 a village Andhana in Patna district was attacked by a Hindu mob where dozens of Muslims were killed although the mob could not enter into the village.[56] The reason for the attack was that the Hindus suspected that a Hindu woman had been forcibly married to a Muslim man and was living in that village against her will. It did not matter to them that the marriage had happened years before and the woman was living voluntarily in the Muslim village. On top of that the only proof the mob had of the Hindu identity of the woman was that she had a tattoo on her arm.[57]

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55 Mohammad Sajad, Muslim Politics in Bihar, p 98-101

56 *Naqeeb,* 20 July, 1946

57 ibid

The Andhana attack led to further disillusionment of Muslims although Congress allies still hoped that the government would hold the criminals accountable.

By August, Jinnah announced that Muslims were frustrated by the Congress's attempt to block Cabinet Mission plan and had lost faith in the constitutional process. This was a call for direct action and Jinnah declared 16th of August 1946 as direct action day to be observed across British India.[58] Although Congress had led many mass movements in the past this was the first mass movement led by ML and that too on a Friday.

Hundreds of thousands of Muslims marched in protest across the cities of British India. However it took a violent turn in Calcutta where a long and painful massacre started. The Hindus and Muslims of all classes started killing each other and there was anarchy for over a week and only army could restore order. Over 5000 were killed as dead bodies lay for days on the roads of Calcutta.[59] Both Congress and ML blamed each other for attacking first and planning the violence.[60] Overall the Muslims, being the minority, firmly believed that they suffered more than the Hindus.[61] The violence in Calcutta had direct effect on Bihar as hundreds of thousands of Biharis were working in Calcutta and came back with stories which led to further communal polarisation in Bihar.

The Benibad attack

The pogroms started in September in Muzaffarpur, a district just north of river Ganges. The apparent cause of this outburst was linked to the great Calcutta Killings which

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58 *Times of India,* 13 August, 1946

59 Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947. p 172-175

60 *Searchlight* 19 August*, Naqeeb [*2,17]*,* September 1946

61 *Naqeeb [*2,17]*,* September 1946

happened over the previous few weeks. The story unfolds in a small village called Benibad, around 24 miles away from Muzaffarpur town. It had around 200 houses out of which around 170 were inhabited by around 800 Muslims of various classes, while the rest were occupied by *Telis* and *Chamars*.[62] Significantly, the administration considered it a Congressi village, even though Congress had performed poorly in the Muslim constituencies.[63] By the last week of October, when Calcutta had been burning for well over a fortnight, two Bengali men reached the neighbourhood of Benibad looking for their sister who was allegedly kidnapped along with a lot of expensive jewellery by Bihari Muslims working in Calcutta. A rumour was afloat that a Bengali Hindu girl had been seen in Benibad recently. An important Arya Samaj member Kubair Singh from the neighbouring village went in a car to file an official complaint to the SDO, amidst a crowd in the market, on 25th.

On the same day, a mob picked up a Muslim girl but returned her two days later. Kubair Singh and others led a large mob to Benibad demanding the retrieval of the Hindu girl. The Muslims denied the charge that there was any kidnapped girl in their village, however, it was conceded that there was a Bengali girl who had married a Bihari migrant, and she had come to Benibad for Eid but had subsequently returned. The mob refused to listen and and took some leading people from Benibad to some Lal Babu of one of the neighbouring villages Koetsa, and coaxed the villagers to commit in writing that they will present the girl within a stipulated time period, otherwise an attack would follow. It is at this point that the Muslims approached the administration, but instead of dismissing the unjust demands of the Hindu mob, the SDO ordered the Muslims to produce the girl by 30th September. Disappointed by the communal attitude of SDO, the Muslims appealed further up, to the DM of Muzaffarpur who happened to be a British man. He took note of the seriousness of the case, and taking

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62 File no 561/46, Home Special, Bihar State Archives

63 ibid

precaution against the imminent attack, directed an ADM with a sizeable force to head to Benibad and guard it for ten days on 26th September.[64]

The ADM however could not reach Benibad on time the next morning, and the reasons he provided for his late arrival are scrutinised thoroughly in the extensive official communication which followed the disaster on 27th. Apparently, one of the trucks accompanying the ADM broke down a few miles before Benibad, and he spent six hours repairing it. It was pointed out in later investigations that this was completely unnecessary, as trucks could have been requested from SP Darbhanga who was about ten miles away, "explaining the urgency" of the situation. But this apparent error of judgement proved to be fatal for the people of Benibad, as the village was attacked by a mob of around 20,000 people variously armed, later in the morning, and by the time the ADM arrived, all the Muslim houses had been looted and burnt to the ground. However, the houses belonging to the *Telis* and *Chamars* had not been burnt down.

In addition to this, 14 people were killed, and the number is small in proportion to the Muslim population because most people had the premonition of an attack and had fled to safer places early in the morning. A local Congressman Hafiz Mohammad Shafee was among the dead. When he was besieged by the mob, he tried to plead saying that he was a Congressi, but the mob retorted that "you serve Congress for money", and "killed him instantly".[65] The mob did not call him a League member, but rather it was impossible for Muslims to be Congressi, and this should be seen as one of ways in which Congress was imagined as essentially a 'Hindu' party by many Hindus of the region. During the attack, a few policemen, an SI and a few constables, had reached there but none of them opened fire. According to one report, the mob approached the SI, but when they learnt that he was a Hindu, they left him

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[64] ibid

[65] ibid

alone.[66] In a memorial on the behalf of Muslim residents, it is mentioned that when the ADM arrived finally, many who had taken part in the violence greeted him and talked normally to him.

The memorial also informs that when SDO visited Koetsa next day, he did not go to those named in the FIR, and did not arrest or search the house of Lal Babu and other ringleaders. The mob was reported to have shouted many slogans including "*Gandhiji ki jai*".[67] The fleeing of the villagers shows that they had no trust in the administration, and had become completely hopeless. The fact that none of the ringleaders were arrested meant that Muslims still feared them, and as the petitioner pointed out, these attackers were busy in eliminating evidence against them.

The news of this attack spread throughout India, as the newspapers of next day contained references to the small village of Benibad. The Searchlight, leading Patna daily described it as a "communal clash" and that a "kidnapped Hindu girl" was at the root of Hindu anger.[68] The Times of India in Bombay reported it as a "riot" and a "clash".[69] The government reacted the next day, as politicians and journalists poured in for inspections, and police was deployed all over the region.The government started relief and rehabilitation for those 800 refugees, and an elaborate system was created to calculate the reparations.[70] The lowest category 'A' contained around 74 individuals, either landless or with very little land, whose collective loss in terms of property damaged and stolen was Rs 8560. The second category 'B' contained 120 proprietors owning between 1 and 10 *bighas* of land whose collective loss was around Rs 16000. The last category 'C' was of 19 wealthy Muslim

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66 ibid

67 ibid

68 *The Searchlight*, 28th September 1946

69 *The Times of India*, 28th September 1946

70 File 585/46, Home Special, BSA

proprietors, who owned anywhere between 10 and 300 *bighas* per head. Their collective loss was of Rs 14000, in which more than half was borne by Md Taslim, the largest proprietor owning 300 *bighas*.

The government decided to grant reparations based on these categories, with the lowest category receiving highest percentage of its claimed losses, and the wealthiest category receiving the least. In addition, around a few thousand rupees were to be sanctioned as loans for rebuilding the destroyed houses, and sum of reparations and loans was decided to be Rs 40,000.[71] Many people were arrested in the next week, but given the strength of the mob, the number of accused must have been very high, and one estimate put it around 4000, and a large proportion of them were absconding.[72] Further investigations led to the discovery of the Bengali girl who had visited Benibad, but it turned out that she was not the kidnapped girl which Hindus were looking for. She had married a man from Benibad in Calcutta and converted to Islam months before the Calcutta riots.[73]

The Benibad attack merits this detailed description here because it appears both like an experiment for and a rehearsal of what was to follow around a month later. The complicit role of the administration is obvious in this narrative, and the failures of various officers were noted in later investigations, even when some of them defended themselves using sound logic. The paperwork which is involved in running the state and the processual nature of the proceedings allow the officers to build consistent stories which explain away their failures. There are sick leaves, or the complaint of infirmity and old age or the breakdown of a truck or any other vehicle, or the breakdown of communication services, the short range of their weapons etc. A various combination of these will exist in any significant

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71 ibid

72 *The Searchlight*, 2nd Dec 1946

73 File no 561/46, Home Special, Bihar State Archives

case of the failure of government apparatus to act, despite the correct orders, which led to a massacre. On the other hand, the mob dispersed after the attack, and not many, at least in proportion to the size of the mob, could be booked for the crime they committed. The sheer size of the mob seemed unprecedented, as it would happen over the coming month as well, where a few hundred people were besieged by a mob comprising tens of thousands. In short, Benibad strategy had proven to be successful, and this was a significant signal to the already aggressive Hindu communal organisations in the context of decolonisation. The Muslims were once again made aware of their utter helplessness in cases of such huge attacks. Additionally, the murder of the Congressi Muslims was a dark portent for the community throughout the region.

This attack seemed to be a dress rehearsal of what was coming a month later that is the attack on thousands of villages in a similar fashion. It is also important to remember Benibad because this happened before the Noakhali attacks which was often cited as the main reason for the attacks on Muslims in Bihar. In Andhana, or in Benibad, the Hindus were not avenging Noakhali which was yet to happen. “Stray incidents” of Hindu-Muslim clashes were reported in September and October where conflicts over Puja processions or animal slaughter occurred frequently in many districts of Bihar.[74]

The Noakhali Attacks

During the second week of October, violence broke out in the remote districts of Noakhali and Tipperah of East Bengal where a large Muslim peasantry attacked Hindus of all classes. Hundreds of Hindus were killed before it was brought under control by the army.[75]

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[74] Searchlight, 8 Oct, 18 Oct 1946

[75] Bidyut Chakarbarty, The Partition of Bengal and Assam p. 106

The reaction to Noakhali riots in Bihar, especially amongst the Hindus, was dependent upon the exaggerated coverage it received in the Hindu press of Bihar and Bengal. They were quick to claim that more than 5000 Hindus were killed in Noakhali. Terrible stories of barbaric atrocities committed by Bengali Muslims were floated in the local media and Suhrawardy was seen as the main culprit for this massacre.[76]

Over the next week of 17th to 25th October anti-Muslim sentiments were expressed openly in processions and meetings all across Bihar which were called in order to mourn Noakhali victims. Many congress leaders like Jagat Narayan Lal took part and gave speeches in these processions and meetings. Their rhetoric was highly charged and slogans such as '*khoon ka badla khoon se lenge*', '*koi muslim bachne na paaye*' were frequently heard.[77] The Muslims were getting increasingly wary as days passed of that fateful week. On 20th October a letter to the editor by these 3 MLAs of ML Mazhar Imam, Badruddin Ahmed and Jafar Imam was published in *Searchlight.* The legislators declared that Bihar had become unsafe for Muslims and that Muslim women were being singled out for attacks. They also reported that the Muslims living in predominantly Hindu villages were also forced to migrate. However they also suggested that Muslims who are scattered among Hindu villages should migrate for their own safety.[78]

According to another report a Hindu Congress MLA warned the Muslims in a private conversation that an attack was imminent and it could only be stopped if Muslims of Bihar go to Noakhali themselves and that their trip to Noakhali is highly publicised.[79] It is

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[76] *Searchlight,* 21 October 1947

[77] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 Feb 1947

[78] *The Searchlight*, 20 October, 1946

[79] *Naqeeb,* 15 November 1946

apparent from all this that the Muslims could sense danger a week in advance. The stage was set for a general massacre of minorities.

The Attacks In and Around the Town of Chhapra

Chhapra was the district headquarter of Saran which lay north of Ganges and west of Gandak. The Muslims formed 10% of the district population while they were more numerous in the town of Chhapra.[80] Attacks on Muslims especially around the issue of cow can be traced back to 1893 where Muslims were attacked in Basantpur.[81] However, in 1946 Chhapra and Saran witnessed the largest attacks on Muslims in the 20th century. Like other districts anti-Noakhali processions and meetings were being organised in Chhapra as well. On 23rd October loudspeakers announced that on 25th, Friday, a strike would be observed in the memory of Noakhali victims. The situation was tense as anti-Muslim slogans were frequently hurled.[82] In an eyewitness report mentioned that local Congress leaders were using loudspeakers fitted to cars and carriages to proclaim that "Hindus should observe *black diwali* on 25th.

A meeting in the town hall was also planned on the day of the strike.[83] The intentions of the local leaders was to incite a section of the people to attack the minority. It was also alleged that the local authorities "were absolutely callous and took no notice" of the inflammatory speeches. They did not make any arrests not were any protective measures taken.[84] It was also reported that all high ranking officers such as DM, DySP, Inspector of

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80 Census of India, 1941

81 Mohammad Sajjad, The Scary Messages from the Saran Riots, 2016

82 *Dawn,* 5 November, 1946

83 *Star of India,* 11 November 1946

84 ibid

Police, SI Police and Civil Surgeon were Hindu-Bengalis and hence Muslims were afraid that they would not play a fair role.[85] On the day of the strike, just before the Friday prayers, it was found that there were anti-Muslim slogans on the walls of the mosque, "calling on the majority people to massacre the minorities" and vehicles with attached loudspeakers roamed around blaring out anti-Muslim slogans.[86] Two prominent Muslims, one of them a *salaar* of Muslim National Guard (MNG) approached the police for help but their apprehensions were dismissed by a Congress MLA at the police station. On their way back Hakeem Sabri, the *salaar* of MNG was butchered while the other Muslim man was seriously injured.[87] By this time a mob of ten thousand armed Hindus started attacking Sahebganj, a locality at the western end of Chhapra. Shops owned by Muslims and their houses were burnt down and Muslims were killed by the mob. After Sahebganj the mob bifurcated and attacked Salimpur mohalla and Butanbadi mohalla.[88]

According to one report no trace of minorities was left in these mohallas after the mob had finished their acts of arson, loot and murder. Apart from this mob, there were several other organised groups which attacked Muslims all over the town.[89] According to eyewitness reports, many of these mobs were being commanded by local responsible Congress leaders. Finally a large Muslim locality Karimganj was attacked by the afternoon of October 25th. The attacks were initially repelled but the mob persisted and attacked Karimganj seven times over the next 24 hours. Finally, on 26th night a much larger and better equipped mob was successful in breaking into the mohalla and then general arson and butchering of minorities and their properties ensued. On 26th the commissioner and DIG took an aerial view of the

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85 ibid

86 *Naqeeb,* 15 November 1946

87 *Star of India,* 11 November 1946

88 ibid

89 ibid

town and then toured the affected areas with the SP. The intervention by the European DIG was crucial in saving many Muslims in mohalla Telpa.[90]

However, on 26th the mob had diverted their attacks towards the villages around Chhapra where the Muslims were more sparsely populated. The size of the mob ranged from 5000 to 15000 and over the next 3-4 days scores of villages were targeted and hundreds of Muslims killed.[91] The attack was concentrated in the Sadar subdivision. Out of 12 PS villages under the charge of 9 PS were attacked. The following thanas were most affected: Chhapra town, Garkha, Baniyapur, Revilganj, Chhapra Mufassal, Manjhi, Mashrak, Parsa and Marhaura.[92] The attacks continued to happen from 25th till the end of the Month. Apart from 15 localities in Chhapra town, there were at least 53 villages which became scenes of major attacks, 28 of them in Chhapra Mufassil PS while 24 in Marhaura PS.[93] Details about the other PS are not mentioned, but it is evident from the archival records that attacks with major casualties took place in these regions as well. Besides the successful ones, there were unsuccessful attacks as well. Sometimes it was the local Hindus who saved the Muslims or sometimes the attacking mob was repelled by the Muslims themselves.[94] It is not that casualties were absent in these incidents, however they are dwarfed by the bigger scenes of massacre.

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90 ibid

91 File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

92 File No. 179/1947, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

93 File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

94 File No. 179/1947, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

Revenue Thana	Police Station (PS)	Total popultation	Muslim population	Number of villages in Revenue Thana
Chhapra		419000	47000	469
	chhapra town	55000	12000	
	revelganj	87000	3300	
	chhapra mufassal	147000	13000	
	baniyapur	107000	13000	
	garkha	72000	5500	
Manjhi		156000	13000	180
	manjhi	83000	8500	
	ekma	78000	4500	
Parsa		276000	25000	444
	parsa	140000	13500	
	marhaura	137000	11500	
Mashrak		173000	18000	237
Total		**1024000**	**103000**	**1330**

There were 1300 villages under the charge of these 9 Thanas with a total population of around 10 lakhs of which about 1 lakh were Muslims. Chhapra town had more than 20% Muslims while the rural areas has less than 10% of Muslim population.[95] Hence in the rural settings, the Muslims were outnumbered heavily and their villages were isolated. Some of those villages are Jalalpur, Rasulpur, Khudaibaag Bazar, Ulhanpur, Dermi, Paighambarpur, Doriganj, Baniyapur, Uswanpur, Revilganj, Manjhi, Makir, Dhobwal Bazar

95 Census of India, 1941

and Garkha.[96] In one village in Baniyapur PS a mob was dispersed by the local MLA by pointing to an aeroplane coming in their direction and telling them they were about to be bombed, but such interventions were rare.[97] The villages were surrounded in such a manner that no help could be sent to the victims. The wounded remained without care or relief for days and many of them died. Although officially less than 200 Muslims were killed in these attacks, according to unofficial sources at least 500 Muslims had been killed and a large number had been wiped out of the villages.[98] The attackers tried to intervene with the relief work too as the American Mission of Chhapra which was trying to help the victims were threatened of violence against them.[99] By 1st November, military in the form of a thousand mixed troops was deployed in Saran district and order could be restored.[100]

The attacks in South Bihar

By 31st as order was being restored in North Bihar, attacks had already started in South Bihar, in the vast region East of Son and West of Bengal border. This region was divided into 4 districts of Patna, Gaya, Monghyr and Bhagalpur. This is a fertile region irrigated by innumerable rivers, tanks, streams etc and it used to witness recurring floods as well. The region was flooded in October-November 1946 as well. The Muslim population of these region was a smaller minority composing under 10% population. In most rural areas their population was even lower.[101] As mentioned above Hindu Mahasabha was also most

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96 Naqeeb, 15 November 1946

97 *Times of India,* 30 October 1946; *Searchlight* 28-31 October 1946

98 *Star of India,* 31 October 1946

99 *Star of India,* 11 November 1946

100 *Star of India,* 02 November 1946

101 Census of India, 1941

concentrated in these districts. The accessibility to newspapers was also better in the regions immediately connected to Patna. On the other hand, this region, especially Magadh, contained most important religious and educational institutes of Muslims. Thousands of small and large Muslim settlements in Magadh which spoke a local variant of Urdu could be taken as the eastern extreme of the Indo-Persian cultural universe. On the other hand, separated from Magadh by the massive Ganges, the more numerous Muslim population of North-East Bihar speak Maithili and represent the Western edge of the Bengali-Maithili universe. The specific nature of the Muslim population in South Bihar in terms of population, education, caste and land ownership also need to be explored to better understand the attacks of 1946.

When Chhapra was burning, anti-Noakhali demonstrations were being organised throughout the region. One such rally was organised in Patna on 26th and a *hartaal* was observed. The local administration allowed the processions which led to further deterioration of the situation. Another such *hartaal* was planned in Gaya town where the administration was swift and the inflammatory speeches were stopped.[102] From the next day, major attacks were reported in the villages of Monghyr, Gaya and Patna districts and the town of Bhagalpur. The number of incidents increased steadily over the next few days with most of the attacks happening between 31st October and 5th of November. According to one statement by the PM in the legislative assembly, there were more than 90 cases of mob actions on 2nd, 3rd and 4th of November while the data for the other days was not available.[103] There were reports of a wide range of violent activities and destruction of small and large villages involving massacre of all the inhabitants, abduction of women, looting of markets and other stray incidents of killing and stabbing.

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[102] *Naqeeb,* 15 November 1946

[103] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 February, 1947

Patna was the worst affected district. Out of 5 subdivisions of the district 4 witnessed major scenes of violence. The *Patna City* subdivision remained relatively secure while *Bihar, Barh, Dinapur and Patna Sadar* were sights of major mob actions.[104]

Patna City subdivision which was primarily urban had a Muslim population of around 25% while the remaining subdivisions had a Muslim population of under 10%.[105] The worst affected division was Bihar subdivision where hundreds of villages were attacked. The subdivisional headquarter, Bihar-Sharif, was an old centre of Muslim learning and administration. Hundreds of Muslim villages were situated around Bihar-Sharif which were attacked in 1946. Almost all of the PS of this subdivision witnessed mob actions and firing by police and military.[106] The population of the subdivision was 7,48,000 of which there were 88,000 Muslims. There were 9 PS in charge of around 900 villages: Bihar, Asthawan, Giriak, Silao, Chandi, Hilsa, Ekangarsarai and Islampur.[107]

According to major WR Venning, who gave an interview to the Statesman, "at least two large and about a hundred small villages" had been wiped out in the Bihar subdivision in the first week of November. He further informed that about 400 people were killed in one of the large villages.[108] "One of the large villages" which Major Venning was talking about is Telhara, a large Muslim village in Ekangarsarai PS, which was destroyed completely and all the Muslims were either killed or were forced to migrate. The village was later populated by neighbouring Hindus. There are many such examples where Muslim settlements stood only in name while their population was replaced by their Hindu neighbours. The second most affected Patna Sadar subdivision where hundreds of villages

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[104] File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[105] Census of India, 1941

[106] File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[107] Census of India, 1941

[108] *Star of India,* 11 November 1946

were attacked in the PS of Patna Rural, Masaurhi and Punpun.[109] Similarly, Barh subdivision also witnessed attacks on hundreds of villages, where the PS of Fatwa, Barh and Bakhtiyarpur were most affected.[110] In the archives at least 200 villages have been mentioned in these subdivisions where an attack was averted or casualties minimised because the local Hindus tried to repel the attack and help the Muslims.[111]

An ADM from Patna reported that 1800 villages in the district contained Muslim population out of which around 400 witnessed major attacks while 70 villages had been completely burnt down. In total, around 700 villages had been completely evacuated by the Muslims.[112] Despite the fact that the scale of violence was unprecedented, especially the swiftness with which it had been executed, the officials tried to give it a positive spin that the Muslims were safe in more than a thousand villages in the district. Patna SP reported that Muslims had been completely exterminated in around 300 villages. The casualties in Patna district were estimated to be between 3000 to 5000 by different officers.[113] As most of the bodies had been burnt, buried or dumped in water bodies, counting the number of the dead was almost impossible.[114] Many victims, especially women, took refuge in the wells and often died in the process. By the time the investigation started, many such wells had been sealed by the officials in order to prevent spread of diseases. As it was noted by the officials, the number of dead bodies did not reflect the number of killed.[115] The number of people killed in a

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[109] File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[110] ibid

[111] File No. 179/1947, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[112] ibid

[113] File No. 652/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[114] ibid

[115] ibid

particular village could be anywhere between the number of bodies found and the number of people missing.

Violence of similar scale was observed in the other three districts. Monghyr, according to official statistics, was the second most affected district where 177 villages were attacked and over a thousand people were killed. The most affected subdivision was Munghyr Sadar and then Jamui. The most affected PS in the Sadar subdivision were Tarapur (more than 350 muslims killed), Kharagpur (140), Barhbigha (11), Sheikhpura (20), Surajgarha (60), Munghyr Mufassil (70) Jamalpur (10).[116] However, according to *Naqeeb,* ten thousand Muslims were killed in Monghyr alone. In Gaya district at least 70 villages were attacked and more than 500 killed. The three subdivsions where villages were attacked were following: Sadar (21 villages attacked), Jahanabad (41), Nawada (10). The total population of these 70 villages was around 24,000. The police stations most affected were: Atri, Khizarsarai, Gaya Mufassil, Pakri Barwan, Jahanabad, Ghosi, Makhdumpur, Arwal. In Bhagalpur, Sadar and Banka subdivisions were attacked in which the PS of Bhagalpur town, Bhagalpur Mufassal, Sultanganj, Shahkund and Banka witnessed major violence.

The attacks started from the town but more than 50 villages in the Sadar subdivision were attacked, although officially the total number of dead was around 150.[117] The attacks started on 27th and continued till the first week of November. Given the shortcomings and difficulties in calculating the total number of the dead, it is difficult to believe the official figure according to which 5334 Muslims and 234 Hindus were killed all over Bihar. LP Singh, the ADM in-charge of reporting these statistics, suggested that 5000 Muslims had been killed in Patna district alone even though the count of bodies did not reach

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116 Ibid

117 Ibid

even a thousand.[118] Papiya Ghosh, in her essay, refers to the ML estimate of 30000 killed and gave preference to this figure rather than the official one.[119] The aim of the attacks, as is evident from the description above, was to eliminate the Muslims from a large stretch of the land around 200 miles East to West and 100 miles from North to South.

On 5th of November Baqrid was celebrated during these widespread massacres. It is only by the second week of November, in the context of national uproar and serious engagement by military, that the attacks stopped. However the rural areas were still unsafe for Muslims and their mobility was restricted. Stray incidents of violence were being reported as late as December, as Muslims travelling in rural areas were still being assaulted, killed and looted.[120] Dead bodies could still be seen floating in the water bodies. In one of the murder investigations in Bihar-Sharif subdivision in December, the police reported that the Muslims still travelled in groups and it was dangerous for them to venture out alone in Hindu neighbourhoods.[121]

Although the scale of violence between 25th October and 8th November was unprecedented, the whole period between August and December seemed to be dangerous for Muslims as numerous cases of violent activities directed against them were reported. Hence there are many phases of the attacks starting with the unsuccessful attacks on Andhana and then burning down of Benibad, they continued as frequent clashes, provocations, stabbings etc were reported throughout the region. Then came the fortnight when massive mob attacks happened after which the military was called. In the final phase, when the government was inundated by the countless FIRs and investigations, there were further isolated cases of

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[118] Ibid

[119] Papiya Ghosh, The 1946 Riot and The Exodus of Bihari Muslims to Dhaka

[120] File No. 728/1946, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

[121] File No. 154/1947, Home Political, Bihar State Archives

violence against Muslims. It is in the phase of the mob action that the Muslim villagers of this region were transformed into refugees and the occasional violence in the third phase further encouraged Muslims to abandon their ancestral lands or, in some cases, to hide their identity by taking up Hindu appearances.

[A road accessibility map of South Bihar, with the *thanas* attacked marked by grey colour[122]]

The Victim's Perspective: Kako, Telhara and Bihar Sharif

Kako was a large and old Muslim majority village in Jehanabad police station in Gaya district. The village was surrounded by three large lakes which made it practically a peninsula and accessible only on one side. It is situated next to the shrine of a medieval Sufi

[122] Map taken from: Jagdish Singh, Transport Geography of South Bihar.

saint, Bibi Kamalo. Another small Muslim village named Bibipur is located near to the shrine. In 1900, Kako village had around six hundred houses of which two hundred were Muslim Zamindari households. There were around one hundred households of various Caste Hindus, such a Kayastha, Bhumiyars, Pandits and some scheduled communities like Musahar and Paswan. Rest households belonged to other classes of Muslims.[123] On Nov 1, 1946, Kako was attacked by a large mob consisting of around five to ten thousand Hindus. Wahab Ashrafi, an Urdu critic from Bibipur, and Syed Fakhri from Kako, who later migrated to Karachi have left the accounts of attack in their memoirs. In the anticipation and fear of threat of attack, the entire Muslim population of Bibipur took shelter in Kako.[124]

On the day of attack a mob reached Kako with *Dhols* and other musical instruments used in Hindu culture, raising slogans like *Bajrang Bali ki Jai.* Women carrying baskets also accompanied the mob to participate in the loot. Syed Fakhri recounts that most of the attackers were from neighbouring villages populated by castes such as Yadavs, Telis and Paswans. Many of the attackers frequented Kako for their professional activities.[125] As the region was flooded during these months, it was almost impossible to enter the village except from the only dry northern edge. Since the Muslims in the village had owned at least four firearms they were able to defend against the mob for more than a day. Frustrated after a day of resistance by the Kako Muslim inhabitants, the mob attacked the neighbouring villages where they could locate Muslims. The surrounding villages such as Modangunj, Attauallah Chak, etc. were completely emptied of Muslims.[126]

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123 Ata Kakvi, Asaar-e-Kako

124 Wahab Ashrafi, Qissa Besimt Zindagi Ka

125 Syed Fakhri, Kako Kahani

126 *Naqeeb,* 15 November 1946

After having finished Muslims in the surroundings of Kako, the mob proceeded on the road which lead to Bihar Sharif. Thirteen miles from Kako, on way to Bihar-Sharif, lay the large village named Telhara. Telhara was a Muslim village in Ekangar Sarai police station in Bihar sharif sub-division in Patna district with a population over a thousand.

As mentioned above, it was destroyed during the pogroms. It is the only village which was discussed in Central Legislative Assembly, and questions regarding the strength of military help sent were raised.[127] Similarly, the official communications of the Bihar government had place for Telhara as an important village, with some of the highest casualties, around 350, according to the official figures, although estimates go up to 900.[128] According to the official sources, the news of an attack of Telhara was received by the military on 3rd November at 1000 hrs, i.e. two days before *Baqrid*. Military help in form of 7 men and two 15 cwt trucks was sent which reached there in two hours owing to roadblocks.[129] They found that the village was surrounded by a mob many of whom were armed with shot guns. The party opened fire on the mob to force an entry into the village, upon which it was found out that "a large number of people" had already been killed and "the survivors were taking shelter in a mosque". It is reported that 400 people were evacuated but hundreds others were left as no more could be accommodated. Another hundred persons were evacuated on the next day i.e. 4th Nov. The military party visited them again on 5th, 6th and 7th to recover the people who were not yet dead, and 'two officers and 30 Other Ranks' were employed in total for the operations on Telhara.[130]

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[127] Central Legislative Assembly Debates, 20th March, 1947

[128] ibid

[129] ibid

[130] ibid

In contrast to the preoccupation with statistical details in the official communications, the reports, petitions, accounts and memoirs left by the Muslims are full of the painful and brutal details often comprising tales of deception and negligence. The figures regarding casualties are mentioned once in a while, but most of the writers did not feel the need to mention numbers, because the destruction was seen as complete. Telhara attack is one of the few cases where we find documentation from the various sides such as local administration, military as well as the victims. In one of the most prominent first person account of the pogroms, Kalim Ajiz has given a vivid and detailed picture of the reaction of the administration to the massive attack on his village Telhara, which was a large village in Patna district with a population of around thousand.[131]

During those years, Kalim Ajiz lived in Patna as a graduate student, and hence he was informed of the attack only when a few young vegetable sellers escaped and reached Patna, some 35 miles away, and they claimed that the attack started the previous evening. Kalim immediately went to the residence of SP Verma and declared that he should be allowed to go to Telhara and demanded help in any form. The SP hopelessly sought military men and trucks from various sources, and was eventually able to muster one armoured car for Kalim, one soldier with a rifle and one driver to travel to Telhara. As they reached Ekangarsarai, they spotted a large tree which had been shelled on the road to block it, and a huge mob on the other side of it. Despite violent protests by Kalim, the car retreated and returned to Patna. Kalim was asked to seek help from '*Doctor Sahab*' as PM S K Sinha was popularly known.

With Telhara still bleeding, Kalim visited PM's residence early morning the next day ie on 4th November, and was given an audience by 10 AM, when he told PM about the siege which Telhara was facing, to which the PM replied that there were disturbances all around Bihar, and it was difficult to help everyone. Although Kalim did not know this,

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[131] Kalim Ajiz, *Jahan Khushboo hi Khushboo Thi,* Pg 240-300

according to the military reports there were still hundreds of people who could have been saved. He spent four hours standing in PM office next to his table waiting for him to pay any attention to them, as visitors came and went. Kalim describes in detail those four hours to the extent that the topics discussed by the PM with his guests were still fresh in his memory. The discussions on beauty, on clothes and on other matters of taste were being indulged into PM, irrespective of the ongoing slaughter in Telhara, or dozens of such large settlements at that very moment. It is after four hours that the PM summoned the IG Police Fazl Hameed, who seemed, in the words of Kalim Ajiz, to be eager and prepared for long to meet the PM. It is at this moment that the PM refers the case to the IG Hameed, and who arranged for a military party immediately to accompany Kalim to Telhara. However, before they could start, a couple of trucks under the supervision of Mehboob Khan, a soldier of INA, returned from Telhara, having recovered some wounded. They informed Kalim that everything had already been destroyed and that it would be useless to go there. Kalim, according to his own account, in a tremendous rage ran into the PM's residence shouting senselessly about the interest Doctor Sahab had in the matters of taste, before being checked by people. He lost his consciousness, only to regain it few hours later, after which he continued his search for military assistance.

We should pause here and reflect on Kalim's account of the morning of 4th November, when he spent four hours in the chamber of the PM. The callousness showed by the PM was decisive, and the inaction itself was fatal for the people of Telhara. Even if the higher authorities are not directly planning the attacks, lack of enthusiasm or artificial engagements are enough, if exhibited properly, to make sure that the attacks are not intercepted. The negligence of which the Gujarat CM Narendra Modi is accused in the context of 2002 riots could very well have been of similar nature. The Sangh Parivar and their administrators have very clear precedent in terms of the strategy: inaction at the top and complicit attitude at the bottom during the pogroms against Muslims. While Narendra Modi,

RSS and BJP are communal villains in the eyes of many politicians and intellectuals of this country, S K Sinha and the top Congress leadership in Bihar has been received as the builders of modern Bihar.

It was only next morning on 5th that he got direct orders from Dy PM A N Sinha during an emergency meeting of Congress party in the Lawn. In order to get petrol for the trucks which were provided, Kalim had to meet L P Singh, an ICS officer, who informed him further about the destruction in Telhara. According to him, by the time he led a military party to Telhara everything had been destroyed. Despite this, Kalim proceeded towards Telhara, and hence describes the scenes of devastation in and around his village in great detail. The riverbed was blood soaked, and so were the streets and there were numerous dead bodies around the mosque. Kalim, who had lost 22 people from his family, had a near religious experience during this trip, and during these days in general, which transformed him into a great poet. As is often during such massacres, Kalim, along with many other Muslims, during and after the pogroms used the Islamic term '*shaheed*' for those who had fallen. Invoking divine rewards and vengeance for the innocents blood, and thereby considering the blood as sacred was an important consolation for the grief-stricken Muslim community. Kalim went on to become one of the most famous Urdu poets of post-colonial Bihar. His first collection '*Wo Jo Shayari Ka Sabab Hua*' (That which became the cause for poetry), was inspired by these attacks directly, as the title suggests:

It was a strange event which became the cause for poetry

I recite *ghazal* so that the world shall not forget it [132]

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[132] میں غزل سناؤں ہوں اسلئے کے زمانہ اسکو بھلا نہ دے - وہ جو شاعری کا سبب ہوا وہ معاملہ بھی عجب ہوا

Another couplet penned down by Kalim which translates the feeling of the Muslim community in this region in the final year of colonial rule is:

The whole garden was ecstatic: the morning is here, the morning is here

As flames erupted from my house, I too was informed of it [133]

One of the oft-repeated couplets in this context was:

Nature has gifted Islam with extreme flexibility

The more you suppress it, the more it will emerge [134]

Another important and visible trope which emerges from the eye witness accounts and oral testimonies, and is absent from official documentation, is the local nature of the mob. In one such account published in an Urdu newspaper Sidq which was run from Barabakni in UP, it was mentioned that the *kahars*, the caste of the palanquin bearers carrying the women of the village who were evacuating to safer places, deserted the Muslims mid-way exposing them to an attack in an open field which followed after a few minutes.[135] Few of the traditional ties between Hindus and Muslims seemed to matter during these days, as many oral testimonies which I have come across mention how the peasants and tenants of neighbouring villages, or groups providing services to the Muslim landlords such as barbers, washermen etc were part of the mobs and actively killed their clients. It is reported in many petitions that in villages where there were few Muslim houses, they had been completely eliminated or were forced to flee. Given the smaller scales of lives at stake in such movements, they are given relatively less attention in the official documentation, while their inability to return to these Hindu-dominated villages form a core part of the grievances of

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[133] یہ پکار سارے چمن میں تھی وہ سحر ہوی وو سحر ہوی - میرے آشیاں سے دھواں اٹھا تو مجھے بھی اسکی خبر ہیے

[134] اسلام کی فطرت میں قدرت نے لچک بخشی ہے - اتنا ہی یہ ابھریگا جتنا کہ دباؤگے

[135] *Sidq*, 20 Dec, 1946

Muslims after the pogroms. The scale and nature of violence resulted in complete breakdown of the local worldview of countless Muslims across this region, and the failure of the government to render justice was only a secondary affair in their eyes. When riots started in urban Patna, Kalim notes in his autobiography that he was pleased with himself that his mother and younger sister who were with him in Patna a few days ago had returned to live amidst her people in Telhara, away from the urban riots of Patna.[136] However, his basic assumption proved to be fallacious, as even though she was with her people in a large Muslim village, the scale of attack was such that the village itself along with his family ceased to exist.

Abdus Samad in his semi-fictional novel, *Dou Gaz Zameen,* describes the situation in Bihar Sharif sub-division where the most massive attacks took place. He writes how Hindu peasants working in the fields all throughout the day would attack Muslim villages during the night. Like the attacks of 1917, messages and chits were circulated which informed about the attacks and its schedule. The lower castes were intoxicated by the planners and instigators of riots and then they proceeded to surround the Muslim villages late in night. The muslims of these villages on hearing the noises thought that dacoits had attacked their villages. However, after waiting for several hours, as the crowd which could be heard raising slogans did not attack, the Muslims realised that their neighbours had gathered to exterminate them. The men prepared to give up their lives fighting while women would contemplate killing themselves by whichever way possible in order to escape the sexual violence anticipated in situations of communal violence. In villages where the mob could not enter or could not identify the Muslim homes, local Hindus including the servants of Muslim households helped the mob in identification. Some of these servants had been raised in the very houses whose doors they now opened for the incoming attackers. The story Abdus

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[136] Kalim Ajiz, *Jahan Khushboo hi Khushboo Thi,* Pg 240-300

Samad tells us is not of only one village. Muslims in hundreds of villages such as Telhara were exterminated in a similar fashion.[137]

Conclusion

As has been noted by Mohammad Sajjad in his book, *Muslim Politics in Bihar*, the muslim electorate was divided among wide variety of forces many of whom opposed partition till the very end. However, their similarities with Congress on the point of *muttahida qaumiyyat* (united nationalism) does not reflect a consensus or a general agreement on all issues concerning Muslims and their rights. There were differences of opinion regarding separate electorates, Cabinet Mission Plan, handling of communal riots etc. The Bihar attacks bring these differences to the centre stage. Bihar was the only Muslim minority province where major attacks with casualties in tens of thousands happened. The other two provinces which witnessed major violence were Bengal and Punjab where Muslims had a slight majority. Hence the Bihar attacks are unique in the history of partition violence, as it is largest one-sided massacre in 1946 and 1947.

The attacks happened mostly in rural areas with two major exceptions of Chapra and Bhagalpur town. The fundamental difference between the mob attack in rural and urban areas is demonstrated very clearly in case of Bihar. While the town of Chapra was brought under control within couple of days, the villages in Saran, surrounding Chapra, could not be secured for almost a week. Similarly Patna city, Gaya town and the town of Monghyr were affected at a relatively lower scale, not only because it was relatively easier to regulate law and order situation in urban spaces but also the news of attacks in urban spaces could spread

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[137] Abdus Samad, Dou Gaz Zameen

very easily and reach the higher command of congress in Delhi. In addition to this, these urban centres had a higher concentration of Muslim population.

Another feature of the attacks was that a great majority of the neighbours living around the Muslims attacked, murdered and looted the minorities. Even if the organisational strength of Congress was not directly involved in the attacks, most of the attackers had voted for Congress in previous elections. Hence in the eyes of the Muslim minority, the difference between the secular posture of congress and communal posturing of Hindu Mahasabha started fading and proved irrelevant.

On the other hand, Muslims were living in small pockets in rural areas surrounded by the majority Hindu population and hence less organised and connected with each other. It was difficult to resist the attacks from the Hindu population in a such a setting particularly because tens of thousands of kilometres square area was attacked at once. In addition to that, rural Bihar was flooded in October November 1946 and hence most of these villages were cut off from the network of rail and road and hence made it difficult for the Muslims to escape the attacks and also hampered the state action to some extent. In addition to this, many Congress leaders and ministers were not interested in return of the Muslims to their native places.

This explains the massive number of refugee migration to urban spaces, as the Muslims realised that they could not ever secure themselves in those rural areas. Such is the nature of attacks in rural areas that the ratio of migration and deaths is many times to the ratio of migration and deaths in the urban areas. As I will discuss in next chapter, hundreds of thousand of muslims became refugees although officially only around 5000 Muslims had been killed. The ratio of deaths to migration was around 1:30 in those communal attacks, and this led to massive depopulation of Muslims in rural Bihar.

CHAPTER 2

Institutional Failure and the Making of Muslim Refugees

Introduction

The governments primary work under the situation of crisis is to provide security to the victims of violence and ensure that the perpetrators of crime are brought to justice. In this chapter, I analyse how the State did not act in the way which would have been beneficial for the maintenance of law and order. In the Bihar Communal attack of 1946, the scale of the attack was unprecedented as figures show how thousands of villages were attacked by mobs in unruly and anarchic way with no fear of the State action. While in ordinary mode of operation, the response of the State to the violence should have been to stop the mobs, using its legitimate coercive powers, but what is reported is otherwise. The state remained a mute spectator, as the police force proved both uninterested and ineffectual in preventing the attack and later dealing with the mobs. This lawlessness continued for over a week until the military was called in first week of November to control the situation. However, as shown in previous chapter, the damage done within the first week was immeasurable and irreparable.

While the state was unable to prevent the attacks on Muslims at the first place, it also miserably failed in the rehabilitation of the survivors of the attack. This chapter discusses that instead of facilitating the rehabilitation of the survivors in their native places, the ruling regime tried to ward off their responsibility by blaming the Muslim League of trouble making and provoking Muslims against the state. This indifference of the government led to the refugee crisis and migration of hundreds of thousands of muslims.

This chapter highlights the differences of approach between the Congress leader in Bihar, S.K Sinha, the contemporary Prime Minister of Bihar and the head of interim government and leader of central Congress party, Jawaharlal Nehru.

State and Police

The head of Bihar government, the Governor of Bihar, had left for Bombay around the time violence started in Chapra, in order to receive his wife who was reaching India from London via the sea. He returned later in the first week of November, around the time that mob violence was subsiding.[138] Hence in the absence of the head of state, the government was run completely by S K Sinha, the Prime Minister of Bihar. Nehru who was leading the interim government also could interfere little because of the provincial autonomy enjoyed under The Government of India Act,1935 (1935 Act). The ML leaders were not pleased with this arrangement, and were wiring the Governor seeking his personal intervention to save the Muslims. The ML argued that the Muslims trusted neither Congress nor the lower administration.[139] The rhetoric used by many leaders at the top, which will be discussed in the next chapter, was also a clear signal to the Muslims that the Noakhali riots of Bengal would be avenged in Bihar. The Benibad attack as discussed in previous chapter demonstrated many of the important ways in which various personnel of lower administration on many occasions sought to subvert orders against the mobs. The Prime Minister of Bihar himself mentioned that the chowkidar and the headmen of the police were themselves shouting slogans such as “Khoon ka badla, Khoon se Lengen” which was in reference to

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[138] *Times of India*, 3rd November 1946

[139] Bihar Legislative Assembly debates, 13th Feb 1947

avenging the Noakhali riots.[140] In any case, as noted in the previous chapter, the personnel available to one Police Thana was no match to the number of villages under its charge and the size of the mobs which attacked scores of villages in each Police Station. The Bihar police was inundated with FIRs, 273 cases against 2205 Hindus were filed in North Bihar while 2365 cases against around 14000 Hindus were filed in South Bihar.[141] It is clear from the number of FIRs as well that the violence in South Bihar was many times more than North Bihar.

An investigation led by L P Singh was conducted in order to punish the guilty policemen and administrators.[142] Their failure to reach on time, false reporting to superiors, the breakdown of communication, failure to shoot at the mob were the various ways in which the orders from superiors were subverted, however in some cases the administration openly sided with the mob. In many cases, policemen refused to follow orders of a superior to shoot.[143] In some cases, the Muslim policemen were themselves accused of inaction, or false reporting. K B Sahay, the revenue minister, and cabinet incharge of investigations of the pogroms, had to ask investigating officers to go easy on isolated Muslim officers who could not act because it was obvious that they feared for their lives. Another important way in which the administration abetted the violence was by seizing weapons from Muslims, even the legally held weapons, in order to make them defenceless.[144] This tactic was reported in many villages, and the question of arms became a political issue very soon, as the Muslim leaders started demanding more weapons from the state. Some petitions argued for general permission for Muslims to bear arms, some asked for more licenses, while others for more

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[140] ibid

[141] ibid

[142] File no 250/47, Home Special, Bihar State Archives

[143] ibid

[144] ibid

bullets.[145] [146] It was argued that the Muslim villages which had sufficient weapons had in many cases withstood the siege and repelled the mob, and hence airdropping more arms to Muslim villages which were besieged was one quick way to end this violence by restoring balance between the strength of the two parties. However, this was not seen as a feasible solution by the Congress government, which instead decided to drop pamphlets informing the mobs that Gandhiji had threatened to sit on a hunger strike if Bihari Hindus did not stop killing Muslims.[147] In one case tins of biscuits were dropped in a besieged Muslim village which frightened the mob because they thought that tins contained cartridges and bullets. Mohammad Yunus, ex PM of Bihar, in his newspaper Patna Times criticised this action of the government, arguing that if real bullets had been dropped, the Muslims could have defended themselves, and such terrible massacre would not have happened.[148]

Besides this failure of state apparatus because of ambiguous approach of many government officers, the sheer scale of the mobs, as discussed earlier, was beyond anything the state could process. Even if it is argued that prevention was impossible given the strength of the police, another important duty of the police was to investigate and apprehend the culprits and deliver justice to the victims. Here again, the system was clogged by various factors such as the number of FIRs, which were over 3000, with more than 15000 accused, and the unavailability of witnesses, most of whom were dead or were in flight refusing to return.[149] The government kept arguing that the reason muslims were refusing to return was that they were exposed to Muslim League propaganda. They alleged that the Muslims were

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[145] File no 1(80)/47, Home Special, BSA

[146] File 728/46, Home Special, BSA

[147] *Searchlight*, 6 November 1946

[148] File no 1(80)/47, Home Special, BSA

[149] Bihar Legislative Assembly debates, 13 Feb 1947

responding to the Muslim League's misrepresentation of the condition of Muslims in Bihar in order to gain their political mileage and popularity amongst muslims for their political benefits. However, it seems that the inability of the ruling regime to ensure peace and tranquility in rural Bihar was one of the main reasons behind the mass migration and evacuation of muslims from the rural areas, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Military

The government did not possess sufficient infrastructure to prevent the mobs everywhere simultaneously, as the size of police forces maintained in every *thana* was no match to the size of the mob. Hence, it was clear from the outset that the British army would be needed to prevent the massacres of Muslims. The violence started on 26th October, but the military was called on 1st November, and by that time violence had spread to the rural areas of at least five districts of Saran, Patna, Gaya, Monghyr and Bhagalpur.[150] The Commissioner of Patna asked for military help on 1st, and it is interesting to note that any administrator above and equal to the rank of Commissioner could ask for military to assist them.[151] The ML leaders, as well the newspapers sympathetic to Muslims criticised the government heavily for not asking for military help sooner.[152] There was a discussion on the religious composition of the military sent to defend Muslims in the Central Legislative Assembly. A total of 12.5 battalions (9 Indian, 1.5 British and 2 Gorkha) were put into operation in Bihar in order to suppress the mobs. The combined strength of British battalions was around 800, while the 9 Indian battalions comprised around 8000 soldiers, while the two Gorkha battalions had 1600

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[150] Central Legislative Assembly debates, 20 March 1947, NAI

[151] ibid

[152] Bihar Legislative Assembly debates, February 47

soldiers: hence a total of around 10,000 soldiers were deployed in Bihar to suppress the riots. In comparison, only 7 battalions and 6500 soldiers were deployed for the suppression of the Noakhali pogroms, while 11 battalions numbering 7000 soldiers were deployed during the great Calcutta riots. In terms of military deployment during this early phase of violence, the higher numbers for Bihar suggest the scale of violence in Bihar. The first batch of soldiers sent to Bihar comprised the 700 British soldiers, 1600 Gorkha soldiers, and 441 soldiers of Punjab battalion. Out of the three, only Punjab battalion had around 200 Muslim soldiers. So the initial military help to Bihar of 2700 soldiers contained around 200 Muslims, while the reinforcements of around 7000 soldiers which were sent later contained around 1300 Muslim soldiers.

Hence, the first deployment contained less than ten percent Muslims, while the reinforcements were just under 20 percent Muslim.[153] Besides, three artillery units composed entirely of Muslims were also employed in Bihar.[154] The demand for Muslim soldiers was widespread among Muslims, especially as more than 36 percent of the British Army was composed of Muslims.[155] In a cartoon published in Dawn newspaper, the fact that the Muslims of Punjab and NWFP were sending medical missions to help the victims of Bihar was made fun of. Punjab and NWFP represented by two large mountains were expected to send Muslim soldiers to quell the mobs and defend Muslims, as they constituted a large part of the Muslim section of the British army.

It is from 4th November that casualties caused by military firing are regularly reported. The biggest such case was in Nagarnausa in Nalanda subdivision, which had been besieged by a mob for over two days, and where the military attacked a mob and killed many

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153 Central Legislative Assembly debates, 20 February 1947, NAI

154 *Star of India,* 7 November, 1946

155 Central Legislative Assembly debates, February 1947, NAI

Hindus on 6th November. It was difficult to estimate the number of killed because the mob would often take away their dead, and the army would report the number of dead bodies it could collect, and it was reported that 313 persons were killed in firing.[156] The estimates for Nagarnausa firing range from 50 to 500, the former being the official figure, while the latter from newspapers.[157] [158] This created a huge uproar among the Hindus which start questioning the role of police and army. The government tried to ensure the reporting of 15 deaths, however it was reiterated by Aaj that many hundreds were killed, and that the government was trying to mask the brutality involved in firing.[159] [160]

Censorship

Another aspect of government's reaction to the communal attacks was the way censorship was used to suppress the news about the killings of the Muslims, ostensibly to prevent further deterioration of communitarian relations. The argument was that exaggerated coverage of the Noakhali attacks were inciting the Hindu mobs in Bihar and hence it should be ensured that no newspaper should carry the religious identity of the attackers and the victims. This decision was taken just before the Bihar attacks began, when for two weeks all newspapers owned by Hindus in Bihar had carried inflammatory articles and news reports.[161] Hence in practice the censorship was too late to control the damage done by the press reports

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[156] Central Legislative Assembly debates, 20 March 1947, NAI

[157] File no 652/46, Home Special, BSA

[158] *Aaj*, 9 November 1946

[159] *Aaj*, 11 November 1946

[160] *Aaj*, 13 November 1946

[161] *Star of India,* 23 October, 1946

and editorials. In contrast what censorship actually achieved was the silencing of the news about the attacks on Muslims. It was because of this censorship that most national newspapers became aware of the scale of killings only by first of November. Villages in the districts of Saran, Patna and Bhagalpur were attacked daily from 26 October 1946 while the National dailies started reporting it from first week of November.[162] Newspapers critical of the government were not spared even if they did not publish inflammatory reports.

One example of this kind of censorship is the way Patna Times owned by former Prime Minister, Mohammad Yunus, was fined and prosecuted by the government. Mohammad Yunus was described as "habitual offender of Press Act" and "the principle Pakistani intriguer in Bihar."[163] His crime was that he gave space to publication of news reports critical of the government and its handling of the communal attacks. Those news reports considered in violation of the prevalent law were only an expression of the demands and expectations of the victim community to the government, which were only four in number. One such report carried the news that the gun licenses of the muslims were withdrawn just before the communal attack.

In another such report it was claimed that Muslim League was taking better care of the refugees than the government in charge and also alleged that government was providing rice at full prices to the refugees which even was less than their requirements. Another article reported that no arrests had taken place by the police or army in the following weeks of the attack. The fourth article alleged that nothing was being done for rehabilitation of the evacuee and refugee muslims. Mohammad Yunus was also the former leader of Muslim Independent Party, which defeated Muslim League in 1937 elections and is celebrated by Papiya Ghosh as party of composite nationalism. Mohammad Yunus joined Muslim League after the Bihar

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162 See *Star of India, Searchlight, Times of India*

163 File no 1(80)/47, Home Special, BSA

massacres and personally collected money for the Qaid-e-Azam Relief Fund for the Muslim victims of Bihar.[164] [165] Another instance censorship was the proscribing of a booklet "The Bihar State Killings - 1946" written by Muslim League legislator, Syed Badruddin Ahmed.[166] Syed Abdul Aziz, a prominent Muslim League leader, in his report titled "The Bihar Tragedy" criticised the censorship enforced by the Bihar government using the following couplet of Akbar Allahabadi:

"Hum Aah bi karte hain toh ho jate hain badnaam
Woh Qatl bhi karte hain tou charcha nahi hota"[167]

The Caste Perspective

Another interesting pattern which stands out in the government documentation is that the overwhelming majority of the people who had been arrested, either for preventive detention or after the attack as accused, belonged to the backward castes, both to the Dalit castes such as Paswan as well as the castes currently classified as OBCs such as Kurmis, Koeris, Dhanuk, Yadav, Mistri, Teli etc.[168][90] An official report from Jehanabad sub-division of Gaya District stated that Rajputs did not take part in violence while Bhumihars, Yadavs and Paswans were amongst the leading attackers.[169] However in an interview with a survivor from village Kansari of Patna rural Police Station, it was highlighted by the respondent that although rajputs of her village did not actively participate in the attack but the attack could not

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[164] *Star of India,* 11 November, 1946

[165] File no 1(80)/47, Home Special, BSA

[166] ibid

[167] Syed Abdul Aziz, The Bihar tragedy

[168] For instance see File 304/47, Home Special, BSA

[169] File no 179/1947, Home Special, BSA

have been possible without the tacit approval and connivance of the Rajputs in her village.

This attack resulted in large scale massacre and complete annihilation of Muslim population from the Kansari village. She was the only survivor in her family who faced the attack in the village and lived in Digha refugee camp in Patna for a month before she was found by a survivor of the family who was not present in the village at the time of attack. She finally ended up in the ghettoised Muslim locality of Sabzibagh where thousands of refugees found a new home after being uprooted from their ancestral homes and livelihoods.

Although the upper castes are rarely reported as leading the attacks, it was primarily the upper castes who staffed the administration and government bodies, as is apparent from cases of attacks of Benibad and Chapra, The lower administration generally had a prepared list of local *goondas* who were to be apprehended in case of disturbances, and on the Hindu side the names contained generally declared criminals from the lower castes. Even among accused, the lower castes were selectively arrested in many cases, as in the case of Benibad itself, the Muslims complain that the main culprits and the ringleaders who belonged to the dominant caste were not arrested.[170] It might be the case that the mob comprised the lower castes in overwhelming numbers, but it was attested by many victims that the mobs were led by leading Congressmen of the area. In the interview with the woman belonging to Kansari village in Patna district which was attacked by the mob, and was site of a military shooting also, recalled that the mob crossed the river one night before with the help of the locals and attacked the next morning. Such allegations suggest that the victims would have seen the local administration as completely ineffectual in dealing with the real culprits i.e the upper caste Hindus who were leading the mobs. On the other hand, it might also mean that if arrests are seen as mere token actions rather than appropriate response to violence by the state then arresting a good number of lower caste people would suffice. The vacated

[170] File 561/46, Home Special, BSA

properties of the Muslims were appropriated by all the classes, but in around a dozen locations which I have visited personally, most of the land has been occupied by backward castes such as *telis*, *kurmis, yadavs* etc.

A tale of two Prime Ministers

The Prime Minister of Bihar SK Sinha was criticised for lack of prompt action when the attacks began. SK Sinha was the PM of Bihar from 1937 to 1939 as well. He was a known cow protectionist who used these symbols for his political benefit. On one occasion he went to the extent of saying that India was being freed of the British in order to get freedom for cows.[171] We have quoted Kaleem Ajiz in the last chapter where he described the PM's indifference towards the plight of the Muslims under siege in Telhara. If we analyse the statements and the policies of SK Sinha during those two weeks, it becomes more apparent that he played a part in inciting the mobs. Just after the violence in Chhapra started, he was quoted as saying that if the Hindus and Muslims of Bihar decided to fight with each other then no power could stop them.[172] It is too clear that this was a veiled threat to the Muslims and an implicit encouragement to the Hindu majority. The censorship imposed by the Bihar government meant that many Muslim newspapers could not publish news about the attacks freely and on the pretext of maintaining communal harmony, very little news was leaked to the outside world during the first week of the violence. It was only on 1st November that the details about the attacks over the last 3-4 days came pouring out. The military was not called immediately and the PM kept flying from Chhapra to Ranchi and back apparently to convince

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171 Asghar Imam Falsafi, Hamari Durgat

172 *Aaj*, 2nd November 1946

the commanders in Ranchi to let the military patrol the rural areas.[173] Even after when the military help had been called, the PM's priorities were still misplaced. On the suggestion of Jagat Narayan Lal, the infamous congressman who was the star of inciting speeches against Muslims, the PM ordered that the dead bodies of the attackers who were killed by the military should be taken proper care of. These dead should not be buried and should be given proper Hindu funeral ceremony.[174] The instinct here is that the bodies of the Hindu attackers, who were martyrs for the likes of Jagat Narayan Lal, should not be defiled and giver proper respect. In a communication to the Chief Secretary of Bihar, S.K.Sinha claimed that the presence of troops had "emboldened Muslims to commit acts of retaliation."[175] He ordered prohibition of parades by the incoming relief workers and their uniform clothing, which he assumed to give strength and space to the Muslims for any retaliation.

Another major concern for the Prime Minister of Bihar was that refugees were not buying tickets of railways while they were fleeing and asks the Chief Secretary to ensure that this did not happen in future.[176] The implication here being that Prime Minister did not consider the violence on Muslims a reason for their migration but the availability to travel by train without tickets a motivation to migrate. This shows how the official misrepresentation played a role in mismanagement of the communal crisis.

Another cabinet member, Mr. K.B Sahay insisted on the need to pay special attention to the mosques by the police.[177] Such statements gave credence to the conspiracy theory that Muslims were storing arms in mosques and planning a backlash. Instead of helping the survivors at this critical point, the cabinet and the prime minister were

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[173] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, February 1947

[174] File no 728/1946, Home Special, BSA

[175] ibid

[176] ibid

[177] ibid

constructing a counter argument to save their faces for their failure in controlling the violence. In this process, apart from the mosques which were at the forefront of relief measures, the other organisations working for the rehabilitation were also harassed. The Prime Minister ordered that the Relief workers who were unable to produce a document of certification from organisations Congress, Muslim League, Hindu Mahasabha, Indian National Army, Khaksaar and Jamiat-ul-Momin would be barred from any voluntary relief work.[178] The Prime Minister of Bihar did not allow an Indian Civil Services Officer N.M.Khan who was sent on a special duty by Government of Bengal, to participate in the relief work. He had come with more than a dozen trucks of aid to tour the region. The government of Bihar refused to cooperate with him and objected to his presence in the region on number of occasions.[179] [180]

When the house met again in February after the attacks, the ML members sought explanation from the PM for his actions. The PM argued that he could not be guilty since Momins, the staunchest supporters of Congress amongst Muslims were also massacred indiscriminately.[181] However, on the demand of an enquiry commission he refused, explaining that any enquiry would revive the old tragedy. The PM insisted that the *forget and forgive* attitude would be better for all as whatever happened in Bihar was merely a reaction of what happened in Calcutta in Noakhali.[182] He compared this massacre with the massacre of minorities in Syria where apparently the minorities has failed to co-operate with the majority in the freedom struggle. Such was the arrogance of this PM that he could still issue threats even after administering over this large massacre. SK Sinha went on to defend Jagat Narayan Lal in the house arguing that many people considered his anti Muslim speeches to be quite

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[178] ibid

[179] ibid

[180] *Naqeeb*, 15 November 1946

[181] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 February 1947

[182] *Searchlight*, 30 November 1946

moderate.[183] The Muslim press was quite critical of SK Sinha. An editorial in Star of India titled the D*ark Province* argues that the PM himself "took a leading part in inciting the mobs". We quote a section here from the editorial:

> "Sinha had a terrible revenge. In any case he cannot plead that the spread of the trouble was too sudden to make adequate measures possible. We declare that Mr Sinha is a public enemy and a criminal worse than a murderer. Mr Sinha presided over the affairs of the dark province right from malevolent satanic spirit that revels in orgies of murder and rapine. The whole of India is at trial. Will this ugly genius be retained at the helm in a province where there is a helpless minority without any guarantee of existence except the whims of a political mahatma to fast unto death for their protection. If Sinha is tolerated as premier, India we think will have a perfect claim to being considered among the most horrifying wonders of the world."[184]

In contrast to SK Sinha and other Congress leaders, Jawaharlal Nehru, the PM of the interim government, attempted to calm and even frighten the attacking mobs. However there were few in his party who thought like him. Even Rajendra Prasad and the socialist Jai Prakash Narayan could only see Noakhali, fanatic Muslim leaguers and anti Congress conspiracy in the Bihar attacks.[185] [186] For his tough stand against the attackers, Nehru was humiliated by students at Patna university. Nehru did not refer to Noakhali while criticising the Bihar attackers and went to the extent of threatening an aerial attack to disperse the mobs. For his positive role Naqeeb, the newspaper of Imarat-e-Shariah published a note of appreciation. Instead of criticising the other top Congressmen directly, Naqeeb went in a

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[183] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 February 1947

[184] *Star of India,* 5 November 1946

[185] For Rajendra Prasad, see *Naqeeb* 30th October, 15th November 1946

[186] For JP Narayan, JP Selected Works, vol IV Pg. 53, 54

round about way declaring that only Nehru of all Congressmen had tried to help Muslims. The note is as follows:

> "Out of all the Hindu leaders he was the only one who felt his responsibility and without caring about the violent emotions of the Hindu mobs he did what he could do in those few days that he stayed in Bihar. But if Jawaharlal Nehru does not devote more time to this province then it would be impossible to extinguish the fire which is being fuelled by irresponsible Congress leaders."[187]

Star of India, a newspaper sympathetic to ML was more direct in its characterisation of Nehru's role during the attacks. It declared that Nehru and Gandhi had proven themselves to be better than the "wolves", a term apparently used for the other Congressmen.[188] Despite his best intentions, Nehru's efforts proved to be too little and too late. Much like the rest of the world, he arrived when the major phase of the attack was over.

Refugees, Rehabilitation and Migration

The coming of existence of refugees which was triggered by the mob actions of late October and early November were unheard of in Bihar.[189] The scale of Benibad rehabilitation, where the refugees numbered around a thousand, was dwarfed by the November migrations. The pattern followed by the refugees in the middle of a chilly winter season seems to be this: when the attack on the village occurred, the villagers gathered in the most well built and strong structure in the village which might be the mosque or the compound of the most powerful Muslim in the village. If the village survived (or even if it

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187 *Naqeeb,* 15 November 1946

188 *Star of India,* 7 November 1946

189 A description can be found in: Papiya Ghosh, Partition's Biharis

didn't, but a few villagers somehow survived), they either sought refuge in the nearest police *thana,* administrative compound, and later when the military intervened, in cantonment and camps, or ran towards the railway station to flee towards safer zones of Muslim population. Often police or military would accompany the refugees to some location, as the railway stations were also attacked, which led to disruption of trains for a few days. In one particular case, a few survivors hid in the mountains for days without food etc, before the boats of Darbhanga Raj could rescue them.[190]

On the other hand, if the train route was taken, the refugees ended up in the nearest important railway station which would be of the respective district headquarters like Chapra, Patna, Gaya, Bhagalpur and Monghyr. Having reached these cities and large towns, the refugees either crowded the homes of their relatives and friends in the Muslim localities there, or the more destitute ones who had no one to turn to were put up in large refugee camps. For many refugees these camps were nothing more than a sojourn, as many started to catch trains leaving from these cities to Bengal.[191] Getting out of reach of Bihari Hindus for good, and entering into the safe towns of ML dominated Bengal was the only survival option in the eyes of thousands of refugees. The impression that better arrangements had been made in Asansol for the refugees than anywhere in Bihar also encouraged this eastwards movement of population on a daily basis.[192] The unprecedented scale of these migration, as documented by the official sources, led to a significant depopulation of Muslims in rural South Bihar.[193]

However, it was made sure by the mobs that the path for refugees from their village to the urban centres was not as straightforward as it appears. There were attacks on

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[190] File no. 250/47, Home Special, BSA

[191] ibid

[192] ibid

[193] Census of India, 1951

every step, for instance many thanas or police parties escorting the evacuees were attacked by the mob. On many occasions the police officials were killed along with the refugees as well. In some cases, the routes taken by the evacuees who were apprehensive of an attack and were moving to safer places was attacked as well. But most important of all was the attacks on railway stations and trains in which hundreds were killed in many separate incidents. As the Muslims running away from the Masaudhi region fled towards the Teragna junction, a mob attacked them and killed more than a hundred people.[194]

Such incidents were frequently repeated, and can be seen as an example of similar methods used by mobs in violence on the Delhi-Lahore route later in 1947. In many cases, the administration had to choose between saving a village which was besieged by a mob close to the *thana* and saving the hundreds of refugees who were being protected by the policemen inside the *thana*. Sometimes the policemen, (including Muslim policemen) could not save villages very close by in order to save the refugees already with them. Hence, the objective of the mob was not to simply drive away the Muslims and loot their property, at least during the most terrible days of violence, it seems, given the extent of violence against the refugees and evacuees, that they were aiming to destroy and annihilate the Muslim population completely.

As a response to the government policy towards the victims of violence, Syed Abdul Aziz presented a memorandum to the Prime Minister of Bihar in December 1946, where Syed Abdul Aziz called for intervention by state while he categorised the refugees and evacuees:

1. Those who lost family and property in totality and were left as lonely survivors
2. Those who survived violent attacks with their families but lost all their property
3. The evacuees who did not face the attack but migrated under the threat of attack
4. Those who survived by hiding their Muslim identity and posed as Hindus

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194 *Aaj,* 3 November 1946

Syed Abdul Aziz highlighted in his memorandum that it was difficult for the first and second category of survivors to return to their native places after the violence on them and their properties. And he suggested that appropriate action by the government could facilitate the rehabilitation of the third category in their native places.[195] He also dismissed the claims that Muslims were leaving Bihar because of Muslim League propaganda. He complained that many private camps were left unattended by one and all and the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) knew barely about one-tenth of what had happened in Bihar. Answering to the official excuse of lack of funds for rehabilitation, Syed Abdul Aziz reminded the government that a crisis situation occurred in 1934 earthquake where lack of funds for rehabilitation necessitated postponement of public works and an additional financial assistance was provided by the federal government for rehabilitation purposes.[196]

In addition to this memorandum to the government, he issued a statement calling on Muslim engineers, lecturers and idle Zamindars to participate in resettlement and rehabilitation of muslims in secure pockets at Thana or Sub-divisional level.[197]

There was immense amount of propaganda from both Congress and ML regarding the refugee crisis, its scale and the possible direction of movement.[198] The newspapers in English as well vernaculars were also lined up on either sides, distorting and exaggerating the conditions of refugees in various camps. However, without effective measures in the country side to ensure the safety of refugees, the propaganda initiated by the government to 'Forget

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[195] Syed Abdul Aziz, The Bihar Tragedy

[196] Syed Abdul Aziz, Majmua e Bayanat

[197] ibid

[198] File no. 728/46, Home Special, BSA

and Forgive' and the request to the refugees and evacuees to move back to their homes proved to be fruitless.The term 'evacuees' is used for the people of those villages which were not attacked and burnt down like the others, but which were nevertheless emptied by the Muslims in the anticipation, genuine or otherwise, of an attack.[199] The villages were being evacuated on a daily basis despite the fact that government was appealing to Muslims to stay put or to return to their villages as apparently, 'peace had been restored'. But the refugees seemed to have given up hope in the administration, and as one petition complained that till the leading member of the mob were still roaming freely in the countryside, it was futile to ask Muslims to return to their homes. The refugees gathered in urban centres of their districts in Bhagalpur, Patna, Gaya and Monghyr. In Patna alone, more than 50,000 refugees had gathered in camps and in private households already by 10th November. The official statistics however could account only for refugee population in camps and not those who were hosted privately by the host Muslim population in those areas.

District	No. of Refugees in camps
Patna (excluding Barh)	37000
Gaya	3000
Monghyr	10000 + 10000 (In camps + Hosted in Homes)
Bhagalpur	4000
Saran	4000
Total	~70000

By the 10th of November, the number of refugees in the camps were around 70000 and more than 3/4th of these refugees were the inhabitants of the rural Patna and

[199] ibid

Monghyr as explained in the table.[200]The data for Patna district was excluding the Barh sub-division. The two other sub-divisions which were affected were Patna rural and Bihar Sharif. The breakup of the data from Patna is 22000 in Patna and 15000 in Bihar Sharif, on 10th of November. By 15th, as smaller camps in rural areas were taken into account, the number of refugees in Bihar sub-division shot upto 30000. The figure for Gaya was also revised as the total number of refugees were now estimated to be 13000 instead of 3000.[201] Hence by 15th of November, at least one hundred thousand had been enumerated further by the government into the list of refugees. Tens of thousands are expected to have still been left out of those lists maintained at the refugee camps as people were anxiously looking for safe migration.

Date	No. of immigrating Refugees to Patna	No. of migrating Refugees to Bengal from Patna
18-11	60	200
19-11	250	200
22-11	130	700
25-11	300	800
27-11	100	1000
Total	840	2900

By the third week of November, as the immigration of refugees in Patna still continued, a greater number of refugees started further migrating to Bengal. The following table shows the official estimates of the number of refugees immigrating and migrating to and

200 ibid

201 ibid

from Patna Junction for five different dates as per report of Relief Officer of the government. He further reports that by 2nd of December, a total of 25000 muslims had left for Calcutta.[202]

On the other hand, even though Shahabad district which comprised the Bhojpuri speaking region bordering UP did not witness widespread violence, Muslims there started evacuating villages around 10th of November.[203] This provides us with some clue to the prevailing atmosphere of violence as well as to the lack of confidence among Muslims on the government, that a refugee stream started from Shahabad, crossed that danger zone of South Bihar to reach Bengal, even though none of the villages were attacked there with such extraordinary brutality and scale. It is because of this later stream of refugees that it is difficult to accept the Congress government's stand seriously that Muslims were migrating to Bengal because of ML's divisive propaganda.

It is difficult to conceive that, and this is mentioned by an ML MLA in the Legislative assembly in a later debate, that the Muslims of the villages where peace was not disturbed would leave their ancestral lands during this weather only because they were inspired by the League propaganda.[204] The evacuation was undoubtedly necessitated by the utter lawlessness of rural Bihar, which, even after the supposed suppression, was not dealt with in proper manner, as the leading culprits were thought to be still roaming free and could resume their anti-Muslim activities again. In their absence, the Muslim property in many of the evacuated villages were thoroughly looted. Even gates and doors were not spared and carried off by Hindus of neighbouring villages, and it soon became an issue for the government to keep the evacuated Muslim structures intact in order to ensure the return of

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202 ibid

203 ibid

204 Bihar LA debates, 13 Feb 1947

Muslim evacuees.[205] The refugees, on the other hand, owned now very little which could be protected by the government as tens of thousands of houses had been burnt down by the mob, and hence, next to rehabilitation of evacuees, the rehabilitation of refugees seemed to be an impossible task.

Besides the protection of evacuated structures, the refugee crisis had led to another insoluble issue for the Government of Bihar, and this was the issue of resources i.e paddy harvesting and protection of cattle. Bihar along with Bengal was suffering from an acute food shortage during this period and deaths caused by hunger were not uncommon during these months. In this context, the mass migration of Muslims meant that they were not going to harvest the paddy crops in November, and this meant that the crops will be destroyed unless they had already not been looted by the people of the neighbouring villages. Besides, their cattle, if not fed, would eventually die. As the number of affected villages was in thousands, and the number of refugees in hundreds of thousands, the scale of crop and cattle wastage in an already hunger stricken society can be imagined. The government of Bihar was well aware of the circumstances and hence was encouraging the Muslims to go back to their villages, so that crop wastage could be minimised.

As the Bihar government could not stem the tide of refugees, it was incumbent upon them to protect the crops from dacoits as well to ensure that the harvesting was done on proper time. Curiously, the government noting the 'serious repercussions on the food position' decides on 13th November that if Hindus preserved the cattle and crops of the now empty Muslim villages, they would not be charged with dacoity and would be exempted from the collective fines.[206] In other words, the government was telling the Hindus that if they did not destroy crops and cattle owned by the Muslim villagers, they could take away the other

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[205] File no. 728/46, Home Special, BSA

[206] File no. 728/46, Home Special, BSA

belongings of the Muslims. The government which was already overburdened also decided to use a part of its administration for looking over the security as well harvesting of the crops.

According to the planned Bihar Harvesting Ordinance, harvested crops would be stored locally and if the refugees did not return, then produce would be sold and proceeds remitted to them wherever they were.[207] Dozens of special officers were made incharge of this operation, and hundreds of inspectors and lower officials were exclusively assigned in these four districts for this activity.[208] It is interesting to note that the expense of harvesting which the government bore initially was to be deducted from the net worth of the crops and the difference was to be paid to the proprietor in person and this is crucial as most proprietors could not have returned because of the anarchic circumstances in their localities. It opens up an interesting direction, as an investigation into the efficiency of this operation could tell us not only about the effect the communal pogroms had on the food crisis of Bihar, but also about the limit of state power in the times of crisis, the helplessness of the state in a scenario when food shortage is further aggravated by a sudden loss of labour power in the country side.

Migration and the idea of Pakistan

Till the point of the refugees started pouring out of Bihar, the idea for Pakistan was a vague one for many Muslims. Many of them had voted for Pakistan in the hope that this would lead to self-determination for Muslims. It was not imagined that they will be driven out from their ancestral lands. Even Muslim League legislators during the Legislative assembly declared that these towns and villages of Bihar are their homes and *watan*, and they do not

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207 *Star of India,* 25 November 1946

208 File no. 728/46, Home Special, BSA

want to abandon it, although Congress is driving them towards it.[209] While some did not know what Pakistan would be, others thought that it would be a government in Muslim majority provinces, about which the common Muslim had probably not even heard.[210] It is only in the context of these massive attacks, where the goal was to exterminate Muslims and their centuries old settlements and institutions that the idea of Pakistan acquired a concrete shape for the Muslims of Bihar. Their Hindu neighbours attacked them, and the government was unable and unwilling to save them. Where the Muslims had weapons they survived, where they did not they were massacred.[211] In addition to that, the idea that more Muslim soldiers should be sent to defend the Muslims of Bihar also points to the fact that the state institutions were not imagined on secular lines. In this context, the massive migration to Bengal and Sindh in November December 1946 become the first taste of Pakistan for this traumatised minority. The camps in Asansol and Dhaka or the resettlement colonies in Karachi became the destination of the Biharis who would be identified as Pakistani citizens in less than a year.

The dip in the population

The extent of migration was total in some regions, to the extent that the Government of Bihar had to create two separate categories of migrants: refugees and evacuees, and the evacuees were encouraged to go back to their villages as soon as possible. In spite of all this, there was a significant drop in the percentage of Muslim population, as noted in the 1951 census, which says that more than 500,000 Muslims migrated just to East

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209 Bihar Legislative Assembly debates, 13 Feb 1947

210 Kalim Ajiz, Abhi Sun Lo Mujhse, pg 103

211 Taqi Rahim, Tehreek e Azadi mein Bihar ke Musalmanon ka Hissa, Chapter 24

Pakistan, which would be more than 10 percent of the total Muslim population in Bihar.[212] If we add the refugees to West Pakistan, the figure would go up. In 1941 census there were 12.5% Muslims in Bihar, while in 1951 census it dropped to 11.5%.[213] The effect was more severe in Magadh where the major attacks took place, take the Muslim population of Patna district for example:

	Percentage of Muslims in Patna		
	1931	1941	1951
Total	11	11	9.5
Urban	24	24	NA
Rural	8.2	8.4	NA

If one projects the urban rural proportions onto 1951 figures, the rural population left in Patna in 1951 would be approximately 6%, or in other words, one in every four rural Muslim of Patna district disappeared between 1941 and 1951.

	Urban / Rural percentages of Muslims in Patna		
	1931	1941	1951
Urban	16	16	18
Rural	84	84	82

[212] Census of India, 1951

[213] ibid

There is a marked shift in the urban rural proportion of Patna district in 1941-1951 period, and this can be attributed to the mass migration of Muslims towards the towns. A sudden shift of two percent means that around 50000 people shifted to towns from villages, in addition to those who migrated out of the district which is reflected in an overall drop of Muslim population across the district. Similar patterns can be observed in other districts of Magadh ie Gaya and Monghyr, where the rural Muslim population was reduced more drastically than the overall percentage drop in the Muslim population of Bihar. Another interesting dimension is the counting of Hindu population. in 1941 census Hindus are 71% while tribals are 16.3%, and Muslims around 12.5%. While in 1951, a lot of tribals are counted as Hindus, and hence Hindus are shown around 86%, while tribals are reduced to 2.5%, while Muslims shrink to 11.5%.[214]

Conclusion

Communal violence might not be an exceptional reality of the societies where two different communities are living together historically, but the inaction and indifference by the state that was claimed to be based on secular principles by the majoritarian community who were at the helm of governance and administration of the province demonstrates the biased and prejudiced nature of the prevailing governance and administrative structures. This partisan behaviour of state was reflected throughout the hierarchy of the governance and administrative levels who did not act to prevent the attacks, nor did they work towards honest relief of the survivors of violence and neither towards the rehabilitation and reparation of the survivors. The police which was at the duty to prevent the communal attack proved

[214] Census of India, 1941 and Census of India, 1951

ineffectual in controlling those attacks mostly. And at some places, police was under-prepared to face such huge mobs which led to the large-scale massacre of the muslims. And Army was called only after the major damage was done and the communal harmony was destroyed for all the times to come for the detriment of the minority community. The Criminal Justice System which is responsible for the prosecution and punishment of the culprits utterly failed to deliver justice to the victims. And the negligence of the state led to further insecurities among muslims who ended up abandoning their ancestral properties only to settle down in ghettoised muslim localities either within Bihar or migration to Bengal or Sind. In the prevailing circumstances of hate and fear, only a fraction of Muslims dared to reclaim their properties after their migration to far off places and sell off their properties to the local Hindu population at meagre prices, the prices which were offered by the belligerent buyers to their own benefit. This affected the financial and social condition of muslims forever after those communal attacks and still is reflected in the current times through their socio-economic and political human development index. The outcry against this condition to which muslims were reduced after such deadly attacks gets reflected in the following couplet:

Zameenein muntaqil karte huye ek kore kaaghaz par

Angutha kab lagaya tha, angutha chhod aaye hain

(Those lands that we transferred on blank papers were signed by us under duress and not the free will that an owner of land would otherwise exercise in the transfer of their property.)

In the context of impending transfer of power, and tentative partition of British India, the migration of Muslims of Bihar to Sindh and Bengal constitute the first massive uprooting of a minority, and the crystallisation of the idea of Pakistan which was yet ambiguous for the Muslims of this Hindu-majority province who had voted for Muslim League and the Pakistan slogan in 1946 elections.

CHAPTER 4

Media **Reportage and the Editorial Bias**

Introduction

An analysis of the coverage which various communal riots received in various newspapers is relevant because it will help us understand the biases with which these newspapers were working, the political mood of their respective audience, and last but not the least, the specific information that was being propagated. It will help us identify the different camps based on different sets of understanding and demands, and the points of agreements and differences between the various political camps. This approach will help us break down the secular-communal binary in the context of late colonial Indian politics, and help us contrast secular-communal nature of any act by placing it in the explosive context of communal riots in that era. On the other hand, an analysis of the diversity of voices in the Muslim press and media helps us complicate the simple binary of Congress and League Muslims, categories which are often translated to nationalist and communal Muslim politics respectively. Through an informed discussion on the stands taken by various Muslim organisations and newspapers on the important issues, I intend to demonstrate that there were many contradictions between the nationalist Muslim's and nationalist Hindu's imagination of a future India. On the other hand, although what separated the ML and nationalist Muslim rhetoric most visibly was the issue of partition, a closer look at the debates demonstrates that there was a sectarian angle to the conflict as well, with the nationalist Muslims, at least in Bihar, rejecting ML as a Shia party.

In this chapter, three different riots will be analysed with respect to the coverage

they received in the newspapers. The Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946, the Noakhali massacres of October 1946, and the attacks on Muslims in Bihar in October-November 1946. The newspapers which are to be analyzed are: Times of India (Bombay) as an example of a national English daily, Searchlight (Patna) as an example of provincial pro-Congress English daily, Aaj (Banares) as an example of a pro-Congress Hindi daily, Naqeeb (Patna) as an example of provincial pro-Congress Urdu newspaper, the Star of India (Calcutta) as an example of provincial pro-ML English daily, and to a lesser extent Zul-Qarnain and Sidq, both Urdu weeklies which took a relatively neutral approach.

The Great Calcutta Killings and the Media coverage

The coverage of Calcutta riots is a case in point. Muslim League declared 16th August as the Direct Action Day, as Congress-ML negotiations at the centre failed.[215] Protests were called by Jinnah throughout the subcontinent, in order to show the lack of confidence in the existing state of affairs. Popular protests were not new in the subcontinent: the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat mobilisation after World War 1, the Civil Disobedience movement in the depression years, and Quit India movement in World War 2 years, all involved massive protests and strikes led by Congress throughout the subcontinent. Direct Action Day was first attempt by the Jinnah-led ML to engage in the politics of crowds and protests at such massive level. And the timing was difficult as well, Bengal was suffering from massive hunger crisis and the general breakdown of law and order which resulted from it. In addition to it, the Suhrawardy government declared 16th August to be a public holiday.[216]

On the Direct Action Day, large Muslim crowds assembled and walked towards

[215] Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947, OUP, Pg 162-165

[216] *Times of India*, 13th August, 1946

the Calcutta maidan in order to take part in the protests, violence broke out during the day.[217] As is the case with most violence involving mobs, it is impossible to exactly pinpoint the first offender. 'Who cast the first brick?" is a question with no definitive answer. However, what is more concrete is the fact that at least four thousand individuals were killed in Calcutta over the next week, and that people from both religions were killed indiscriminately.[218] These massacres were referred to as the Great Calcutta Killings. People from all classes took part in the violence, and rich and poor were killed indiscriminately. The strengthening of communal consciousness among the general mobs went along with the weakening of class divide inside the community. Hundreds of notable Hindus and Muslims were killed by the mobs, and many were left hanging to lamp posts on the streets. Thousands of houses, both small and large, were burnt down to the ground. Dozens of mosques and temples were destroyed or desecrated, and in many cases copies of Qurans were burnt.[219] These riots rocked the British empire, as Calcutta was the second largest city in the subcontinent, and was still one of the most important economic centres. This barbaric conflict between these two communities in Calcutta had implications beyond the regional politics, as national discourse between Congress-ML in the context of impending transfer of power was also effected.

The 'Nationalist' Hindu Media

The newspaper coverage of the Great Calcutta Killings was a divisive affair, as partisan reporters took the side of their own communities, propagated news damaging to the other

[217] Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947, OUP, Pg 170

[218] Suranjan Das, Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947, OUP, Pg 172-175

[219] *Times of India*, 19th August, 21st August 1946; *Naqeeb* September, 1946

side. There can be two dimensions along which the local reporters could be partisan: their political affiliation, and their religious faith. Given two poles of Congress and ML in the political dimension, the newspapers will be summarily classified as pro-Congress, pro-ML or tending towards neutrality. Their attitude towards the provincial state will be decided by their political affiliation as well. The other dimension of religious faith will also divide the reporters and their audience into Hindus and Muslims in the case of Hindu-Muslim rioting. Each community focused on the loss it had to bear in the violence.

On the Congress side of the media, lets look at the coverage by TOI and the Searchlight. First lets look at the Searchlight from Patna picked articles from the local Hindu press of Calcutta uncritically. Displaying its habitual pro-Congress bias, these newspapers put the blame on ML as it controlled the Bengal administration.[220] The declaration of 16th August as public holiday was also seen as a sinister ploy by ML to allow disturbances to take place.[221] Maulana Azad also reiterated this charge, and claimed that "responsibility for all that had happened must be borne by the Ministry of Bengal".[222] However, TOI is critical of this stand, as it mentions that public holiday was declared in other provinces ruled by ML as well, and they did not witness such violence.[223] The assertion of organised Muslims masses under ML leadership was seen as a blatantly communal show of strength, in contrast to the mass movements led by Congress which were seen as 'national' in character. And the coverage, especially by Searchlight, focussed on the loss suffered by the Hindu community: for instance there would be a mention of how Congress leaders' house were burnt by the mob, but a similar attack on notable Muslims by Hindu mobs would not be

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[220] *Searchlight*, 1st October, 1946

[221] *Searchlight*, 1st October, 1946

[222] *Times of India,* 20th August, 1946

[223] *Times of India*, 20th August, 1946

reported.[224]

The TOI was however, relatively moderate, as it tried to give space to the British as well as the ML rhetoric besides the Congress. Hence the TOI published the official ML response against the charges laid down by the Congress.[225] In a sober editorial on 20th August, TOI told its readers that it is "not impressed by the argument" that ML was complicit in the riots because it declared a public holiday on 16th August. According to the editorial, the Bengal government was however guilty of "not securing maximum discipline in" their party ML.[226] On September 6, TOI published some excerpts from the ML rejoinder to the report prepared by Congress on the Calcutta Killings. It was argued from ML's perspective in the article that it was untrue that Hindus only retaliated against attacks by Muslim mobs, and that, Hindu mobs too attacked Muslims in large numbers.[227] In contrast to the partisan coverage by the Searchlight, TOI took a more moderate approach, and did not rush to blame any party immediately. But most of the provincial newspapers played a more biased role, and attempted to colour the riots as a ploy of the opposite party.

The 'Nationalist' Muslim Media

When compared to the two newspapers mentioned above, the pro-Congress section of the Muslim media agreed with their analysis as far as putting the blame on ML is concerned. However, these newspapers were more emphatic about the greater loss suffered by the Muslim community in the Great Calcutta Killings. Let us look at the Urdu newspaper

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[224] *Searchlight*, 20th August, 1946

[225] *Times of India*, 6th September, 1946

[226] *Times of India*, 20th August, 1946

[227] *Times of India*, 6th September, 1946

Naqeeb which was published in Patna by Imarat e Shariah. It reported that it was because of ML's Direct Action Day that there "were terrifying riots [*fasaad*] in many cities including Calcutta". It was not "surprising", as ML rule had injected masses with "lethal doses of communalism." It claimed that 'ML had been planning these attacks for months." PM Suhrawardy was declared as "the hero of these bloody massacres", not the least because he declared 16th August to be a public holiday. It was also noted that he was not in control for many days, as goondas and hooligans ruled over the city, as the conflict deteriorated into a 'civil war'. Naqeeb quotes the Congress president to confirm their analysis that the ML was responsible for the riots. [228]

However, beyond this point, the narrative is in contrast with the Hindu press. Naqeeb reports that "the majority of those killed or wounded were Muslims", despite the fact that Bengal was being ruled by ML. There were reports of Quran burning, destruction of mosques, and mass shooting against Muslims by police and the army. The author wonders that if ML, which is the party incharge, cannot secure the lives of Muslims in the 'future capital of Pakistan', then on what grounds can Pakistan be demanded? The main report published by Naqeeb on the Calcutta killings is aptly titled: 'The Graveyard of Pakistan!'. It also claimed that Muslims suffered more in ML ruled Calcutta, than in recent riots in Congress ruled states. Despite the fact that, "the organised forces of Pakistan" were present in the city, "the corpses of thousands of Muslims" were lying on the roads, while "vultures and dogs were feasting over them".[229] ML's capacity to rule was challenged by the newspaper, however, there was another interesting angle from which Naqeeb repeatedly attacked ML, and that was its sectarian credentials.

Imarat e Shariah, as already discussed, is a Sunni organisation affiliated to

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[228] *Naqeeb*, September [2,17], 1946

[229] *Naqeeb*, September [2,17], 1946

Deoband, which floated and supported the most successful Muslim political party of Bihar in 1937 elections. Their theological stand against Shi'ism varies from rejection at worst, to cold toleration at best, and Qadiani sect is considered as heretical, and beyond the pale of Islam. The newspaper Naqeeb also raises the sectarian question repeatedly, published polemics against Shi'ism and Qadianism, and was always doubtful of the intentions of these sects in India. During the election campaign of 1946, Naqeeb published many articles in support of the candidates floated by Muslim parties sympathetic to Congress. In its anti-ML zeal, the newspaper often declared that ML was a Shia party, and that Shias could never be true leader of Islam.[230] Since the days of Khilafat movement, there was a tension between the Sunnis and Shias on the method of political mobilisation, especially as the Caliph was not a Shia symbol - political or theological.[231] This needs further exploration, as by the last decade of colonial rule, the rhetoric has become highly charged against the Shias. Naqeeb repeatedly pointed out that Jinnah was a Shia, and that there were a good number of Shia leaders in the top ranks of ML. It was also argued that Qadiani involvement in ML implied that the party is not of Muslims solely.[232] Naqeeb went to the extent of arguing that a Qadiani should not be offered water, even if he is dying of thirst.[233] It would be difficult to find such expressions of hatred against Hindus in ML propaganda. When Jinnah nominated a member from the Untouchable communities, Naqeeb took a jibe, telling us it was not the first time that a non-Muslim has been involved, and that the newspaper has "always claimed that ML is not a Muslim party, as it contained Qadianis'.[234]

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[230] *Naqeeb*, December 1945, January 1946, September 1946, and many other places

[231] Gail Minault, The Khilafat Movement, pg 97-98

[232] *Naqeeb*, December, 1945

[233] *Naqeeb*, December, 1945

[234] *Naqeeb*, October [2,17,31], 1946

However, the Shias, who were seen as Muslims, even if barely, by the Imarat, were singled out for criticism by the newspaper. The Shias were blamed for the defeat of Abbasids, for the defeat and murder of Tipu, and even for the decline of Mughal empire, and the emergence of British colonialism.[235] In other words, for Naqeeb, the Shias seem to be the main anti-people conspirators in the history of Islam. It is repeatedly argued that the Shias constitute relatively rich and well-connected communities in the subcontinent, and for their survival they raise the spectre of 'communalism' to frighten Muslims into forming a pan-India front against Hindus. In this way, they use the Sunnis, who are the poor masses, as pawns, while they themselves are safe in their rich secure neighbourhoods which are rarely attacked. It is argued that the Shia tradition of '*taqiah*' allows them to lie and switch sides easily, all with the sole intention of defending Shi'ism i.e. themselves, and not Islam, and the masses are being used as cannon fodder in order to achieve the Shia goals.[236]

Naqeeb saw the same phenomenon in the Calcutta killings as well. The Shia party injected the masses 'with doses of communalism', in order to achieve the goal of Pakistan. What ML called *jihad*, Naqeeb saw as '*fasaad*'. When the Sunni masses of Calcutta suffered heavily against the Hindu mobs, and fought against them, 'they were wondering about the whereabouts of the ML leaders'. Many Muslims were expecting that on hearing about the tragedy, "Qaid e Azam will fly to Calcutta". [237] However, Naqeeb pitied the stupidity of these Muslims, as the ministry loving leaders of ML will not risk their lives for the Muslim masses. Naqeeb contrasts this to the Congress way of struggle, in which the top leaders court arrest before their followers, or the revolutionary way, in which Bhagat Singh would give up his life, and ask the others to do the same. Naqeeb asked the ML leaders to at least own up to the

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[235] *Naqeeb*, January, 1946

[236] *Naqeeb*, September [2,17], 1946

[237] *Naqeeb*, September [2,17], 1946

'*fasaad*' they caused.[238]

In short, Naqeeb took pro-Congress stand in the context of Calcutta riots, and argued that ML was responsible for the riots. In addition to that, it also argued that it was Muslims who suffered the most in these riots, and that ML being a Shia party, plays the dirty game of communalism in which poor Sunni Muslims were massacred while the party of rich scored points over their dead bodies.

On the other hand, the Muslim run newspapers which were not particularly sympathetic to the cause of Congress or were overtly pro-ML, were more cautious in attributing blame to the ML directly. On the other hand, the fact that greater loss was suffered by the Muslim community in an ML-ruled Bengal was given the opposite spin by pro-ML media. Unlike Naqeeb which attributed the loss of Muslim blood to the failures of an incompetent and heretical ML, this section of newspapers blamed Congress and Mahasabha for inciting Hindus against Muslims, and spreading a false sense of insecurity among Hindus in a Hindu-majority city. These newspapers like Dawn, Star of India were critical of the coverage by the Congress media, and statements by Congress politicians, arguing that it was Muslims who were taken aback, and were killed by organized Hindu mobs in Calcutta.

The Spectre of Noakhali

The Direct Action Day on 16th August 1946 was followed by the colossal Calcutta killings, which shocked the entire British India. More than 5000 were killed in the city in violent activities which continued for weeks.[239] The polarised coverage that the 'great'

[238] *Naqeeb*, September [2,17], 1946

[239] Bidyut Chakrabarty, The Partition of Bengal and Assam, Pg 97-100

Calcutta killings received throughout the subcontinent. The pro-Congress press across India saw in these killings a role of the Muslim League administration in Bengal, and closer home in Bengal and consequentially for Bihari Hindu migrants in Calcutta, this was an assertion from the hitherto subservient Muslim majority of Bengal, which was challenging the Hindus to an open fight even in Calcutta.[240] On the other hand, for the Muslim psyche, the riots were seen as more detrimental to the Muslim community in Calcutta, who were in a minority in the city, and hence an emphasis on closing the ranks against the assault from the Hindu nationalism, which came to be identified more and more with Congress in the eyes of Muslims.[241]

Historians have noted that the riots of late colonial times in Bengal were different from the earlier riots as the primacy of class consciousness in the earlier riots was replaced by an increasingly confessional solidarity across classes.[242] For instance, many Muslim moneylenders were attacked by Muslim peasants in rural riots in 1930, while in Calcutta in 1946, poor Muslims or Hindus could be found killing poor families of the other community.[243]

The attacks on Hindus in the eastern districts of Noakhali and Tipperah started around 10th October, and spread beyond the town to villages which were not easily accessible to the police or the army.[244] The disturbances could not be brought under control before 10 days of violence in the countryside. Many immediate reasons have been given for these

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[240] Suranjan Das, Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Colonial Bengal: An Analytic Framework, *Social Scientist*, Vol 18, No 6/7

[241] Joya Chaterji, Bengal Divided, CUP 2002

[242] Suranjan Das, Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Colonial Bengal: An Analytic Framework, *Social Scientist*, Vol 18, No 6/7

[243] Bidyut Chakrabarty, The Partition of Bengal and Assam, Pg 97-100

[244] Bidyut Chakrabarty, The Partition of Bengal and Assam, Pg 101-103

breakouts, although agrarian violence in rural Bengal was not uncommon, and neither was its taking a communal colour new, given that the class divide was augmented by the communal divide in many districts of eastern Bengal with thinner Hindu population.[245] The 'artificially' deflated jute prices in the face of high demand was causing unrest among the largely Muslim peasantry of rural Noakhali, which expressed itself in the form of traditional agrarian outbreak.[246] However, there was another factor which mitigated this clear cut class divide: a decisive crystallisation of communal identities had taken place, as the Muslim peasantry was receiving news of massive losses to the Muslims side in Calcutta, and was seeking revenge from the Hindus in their territory. [247]

The official statistics of the casualties in these two districts can never be ascertained beyond doubt. The official figures as released by the Government of Bengal provide the minimal baseline. The combined figures of the two districts were 217 Hindus and 68 Muslims dead, 100 Hindus and 42 Muslims wounded. 18 rapes were officially recorded, and 8 cases of abduction were acknowledged. All of these are petty figures, what stands out is the figure for cases of forced conversion to Islam: 13352 in total.[248] The reports by national and local Hindu press put the figure above 5000 dead in many articles, although this figure has not been taken seriously by later historians. Joya Chatterjee tells us that 'hundreds were killed', and Bid Chakrabarty considers the official figures to be an underestimate.[249] Arthur Henderson, the British Under-Secretary of State for India, also reported to the House of

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[245] Suranjan Das, Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Colonial Bengal: An Analytic Framework, *Social Scientist,* Vol 18, No 6/7

[246] Sugata Bose, Agrarian Bengal, CUP, 2007, Pg 223

[247] Suranjan Das, Communal Violence in Twentieth Century Colonial Bengal: An Analytic Framework, *Social Scientist*, Vol 18, No 6/7

[248] Bidyut Chakrabarty, The Partition of Bengal and Assam, Pg 106

[249] Joya Chatterji, Bengal Divided, CUP 2002, Pg 239

Commons that 'the casualties are to be numbered in hundreds and not thousands.'[250] Sugata Bose considers these "three figure estimates" as understatements, but the 5000 figure reported by a section of Calcutta press is also exaggerated in his view. [251]

We pause here to compare the relevant statistics for the riots in eastern Bengal and Bihar. According to official figures, casualties in Bihar were around ten times the casualties in Bengal. The ratios for dead and refugees are 400:5000 (~1/12th) and 30,000:200,000 (~1/7th) respectively. The odd category is the number of forced conversions, 13352, which brings a parity between the number of people directly assaulted in the two "disturbances". There are cases where upper caste Hindus were forced to convert to Islam, and forced to eat beef. In contrast, the number of forced conversions to Hinduism in Bihar were estimated officially to be around 200, and most of these cases were dismissed as incidents where the Muslims were forced to shave their beards.[252] However, the number of refugees in Bihar is many times the number of refugees in Eastern Bengal. If we base ourselves on the unofficial estimates proposed by other parties and which seem more reasonable to some historians then the ratio for deaths would still be close: 3000:30000 (1/10th).

'Nationalist' Press and Noakhali

The national as well regional press was split on religious lines in covering Noakhali. The contrast is sharp when compared to the coverage of Calcutta killings, where instead of the casualty figures, which were high on both sides, the responsibility of the Suhrawardy administration was debated by the Hindu and

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[250] *Times of India*, 26th October 1946: 'Mob frenzy in East Bengal'

[251] Sugata Bose, Agrarian Bengal, CUP, 2007, Pg 227

[252] as reported by Bihar PM S K Sinha, Legislative Assembly Debates, 13 February 1947

Muslim press.[253] Calcutta was a metropolitan, hence a detailed press coverage was expected. However, during the Noakhali and Tipperah riots, owing to the proliferation of rumours and lack of credible news broadcasting from these inaccessible eastern districts, the national and local media split along religious lines on the issue of scale of attack and casualties itself. Another important point to be kept in mind is that in the rural riots, the statistics which is reported real time seems to be either a guess work, or a rumour. Hence, respected newspapers refrain from highlighting any claims as facts before the dust settles down, and an official or semi-official investigation has been conducted. It is for the same reason that in the events of riots, censorship, i.e censoring of rumours and baseless claims, emerges as one of the most critical safety tools.

The pro-Congress press was quick to compare the Noakhali attacks to the Calcutta killings, and reported similar scale of casualties. However, some national newspapers for instance The Times of India published from Bombay took a more cautious approach in assessing the damage. However in the intial days, even this newspaper was reporting and quoting the right wing Hindu narrative to a certain extent. TOI on October 15th quotes All India Hindu Mahasabha General Secretary who toured the region, where he claims that that casualties "has to be counted not in hundreds but in thousands".[254] On 17th October, the TOI tells its readers in bold that 'Noakhali Disturbances [were] worse than Calcutta', and that in Ramganj thana alone, 'hundreds were burnt', and hundreds of others killed.[255] However, by October 22nd,

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253 for instance, coverage by Urdu newspaper *Naqeeb* published from Patna which argued that Muslim League was responsible for this catastrophe

254 *TOI*, 15 October 1946, 'Strong Steps to Restore Order in Noakhali'

255 *TOI*, 17 October 1946, 'Noakhali Disturbances Worse than Calcutta'

TOI retreated from the exaggerated coverage of the Noakhali attacks, publishing articles after articles in order to present more plausible statistics. On Ocotber 22nd, TOI reports that the figure of 5000 is 'definitely a gross over-estimate', and that the report sent by Governor of Bengal puts the estimate in hundreds.[256] On October 25, the Muslim League estimate is published by TOI, where the number of dead was put at 115, the ML's appeal to the Hindu press to stop misinformation was also reported. However, these redressals were a little too late, as massive attacks on Muslims in Bihar had started on 24th October, under the pretext of seeking revenge for Noakhali. Despite the retreat of newspapers such as TOI, two weeks of exaggerated coverage in the local press, both Hindi and English, had provided enough fuel to the communal fire in Bihar.

The Searchlight was the leading English daily of Patna, which had Sir Hasan Imam, a leading first generation Congressman hailing from rural Patna, as one of its founders. However, in the polarised environment of 1946 it was being run by partisan Congress sympathisers. The contrast between the way Bengal and Bihar riots were covered by The Searchlight is significant. In the case of Noakhali, there were consecutive headlines on the main page which announced the terrible assaults on Hindus in East Bengal. On 16th October, the Searchlight tells its readers that 'Goonda Raj' prevailed in East Bengal.[257] On 19th October, it reports on the top of the front page that '5000 [were] killed in Noakhali and Tipperah'. [258] On 21st October, Congress leader Rajendra Prasad was quoted as saying that "all houses [have been] burnt and looted". On the same day, Gandhi through The Searchlight appealed to the

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256 *Times of India*, 26th October 1946: 'Mob frenzy in East Bengal'

257 *Searchlight*, 16,17 October 1946

258 *Searchlight*, 19 October, 1946

women to "take posion" to avoid getting raped by the attackers. Another editorial from 21st October tells it viewers that the East Bengal massacres were "carefully planned".[259] On 23rd The Searchlight exhorts the Hindus to defend themselves "by any means".[260] On 26th, after the attacks have started in north Bihar, The Searchlight informs its readers that the 'Goonda Raj' has spread to Dacca and Faridpur.[261] On 27th, it reports that 'Bihar [is] indignant over Noakhali outrage'. Scores of front page articles and editorials which portrayed Noakhali as a disaster comparable to Calcutta were published by the Searchlight through these critical weeks when massive attacks on Muslims were just beginning in northern Bihar. Unlike TOI, The Searchlight did not show any hesitation in reporting the rumours about these inaccessible regions and fully endorsed the claims that this was a massive ML conspiracy in which thousands of Hindus had been killed. The words used for covering Noakhali are 'outrage', 'massacre', 'Goonda Raj' etc. It stands in stark contrast to the coverage of Bihar attacks by the same newspaper where terms like 'communal clash', 'flare up', 'disturbances' and 'tensions' were used. However, the coverage of Bihar attacks will be dealt separately in another section.

On similar lines, Aaj, a Hindi daily published in Banares, covered the Bengal and Bihar riots in different ways. The casualty figures were put around 5000, and the Hindus were exhorted to organise against the communal Muslim menace.[262] Even as late as 2nd November, when the attacks in Bihar are at its peak, Aaj told its

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[259] *Searchlight*, 21 October, 1946

[260] *Searchlight*, 23 October 1946

[261] *Searchlight*, 26 October 1946

[262] *Aaj*, 18 October, 1946

readers that Bhopal could become another Noakhali.[263] It also reported that Sardar Patel of Congress has allegedly warned that if the Bengal attacks were not stopped, then Hindus might start taking revenge in Bihar.[264] Special attention was given to the cases of forced conversions to Islam, and the Hindus were urged to take these people back into their religious fold, and since they were never left the Hindu fold willingly, hence they need not repent in order to be accepted.[265]

Such was the coverage of the Noakhali and Tipperah riots in these 'nationalist' newspapers. At the local level, there was an immense amount of exaggeration and hate-mongering against the ML and sometimes against the Muslims in general. These newspapers repeatedly quoted the inflammatory statements of leading politicians as well, which will be discussed in a later section. The casualty figures published by the local Hindu press in Bengal and Bihar became a self-fulfilling prophecy, given the scale of attacks in Bihar. Things happened in quick succession, and during that crucial week in Bihar, the newspapers spread the news that 5000 Hindus had been killed by Muslim mobs in these two districts. The press and the politicians at best confirmed the rumours which had already proliferated throughout Bihar, or at worst, were instrumental in spreading some of the rumours themselves. The effect of the propaganda was such that many Noakhali Days were celebrated in these weeks across Bihar, where people who gathered to mourn the victims of Noakhali, often took to sloganeering against their Muslim neighbours. These newspapers which were respected and considered credible by a large section of Hindu population had an important part to play in this process.

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263 *Aaj*, (Banares), 2 November, 1946

264 *Aaj*, 5 November, 1946

265 *Aaj*, 1, 7 Novermber, 1946

It would be pertinent to end this section with an extensive quote from TOI, which on 8th February, 1947 through an article sought to put the Noakhali riots into perspective, in the aftermath of release of official statistics from the Government of Bengal:

"There is a striking object lesson for India in the Noakhali casualty figures as revealed by Mr. Suhrawardy, the Premier of Bengal." .. According to Mr. Suhrawardy, the official figures of the disturbances which occurred in East Bengal last October show that 182 persons were killed and 69 injured in the Noakhali and Tippera districts. It is possible that the figures err on the small side owing to the difficulty of collecting evidence, but that they are obviously near enough the mark to place the East Bengal disturbances in their proper perspective. Compared with the earlier blood bath in Calcutta, where about 4000 people were officially reported to have been killed, the East Bengal total is insignificant. In Bombay city, for example, over 800 people have already died as the result of disturbances which began on September 1, 1946.

The East Bengal affair illustrates vividly the evil effects of rumours and exaggeration. That the magnification of what happened in the Noakhali and Tippera districts was responsible for the far more serious outbreak of communal bloodshed in Bihar is generally admitted. Had the truth been known at the time it is most unlikely that the trouble in Bihar would have occurred, or even if it had occurred it would have on a much smaller scale. Communal passions were roused by the false reports spread about what had happened in East Bengal. The moral is obvious: it is the duty of the Government to prevent the spread of highly coloured and exaggerated accounts of Hindu-Muslim riots, and those who spread such stories must recognise that they are

the enemies of communal unity."[266]

It is hard to believe that the same newspaper, which appears skeptical of rumour-mongering in this case, called the Noakhali attacks 'worse than Calcutta' on 17th October. This 'perspective' piece from TOI contains an implicit apology, given that they did indulge in such reporting as well. However, by February, significant change had occurred in the Muslim opinion and the expectation of Muslim masses from the Muslim leaders. The rift between the 'nationalist' Hindu and 'nationalist' Muslim press had already started with the coverage of Noakhali where different narratives were being forwarded by the nationalists of different religions. We will turn now to the coverage which Calcutta and Noakhali riots received in the Muslim press.

The Muslim Press and Noakhali

In the case of the Calcutta killings, the Muslim newspapers reacted in various ways, depending on their stand about the larger political conflict in the subcontinent. Newspaper sympathetic to Congress like Naqeeb criticized ML, and challenged its competence to both rule Bengal and lead Muslims. Newspapers opposing Congress such as Dawn, The Star of India covered the riots in a different fashion, arguing that the Hindu mob organised by Congress was instrumental in wreaking havoc and starting the mayhem in the city. One section of Muslim media supported the Congress narrative whole-heartedly in August-September 1946, while others differed from it to various degrees. However, the situation during the Noakhali attacks is considerably different, and it seems that conflicting narratives are being pursued by the Hindu and Muslim supporters of Congress. As Bihar attacks happened in quick succession after Noakhali attacks, independent references to

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[266] *TOI*, 8 February 1947

Noakhali attacks figure in the Muslim papers for less than two weeks, ie 10th October to 24th October. Thereafter, all references to Noakhali attacks in these newspapers were linked to a debunking of the exaggerated myth of a massive massacre propagated by Congress and its organs as discussed in the previous section.

The pro-Congress Urdu newspaper Naqeeb, which repeatedly called itself *qaumparast,* literally nation-worshipping or nationalist, declared that the Noakhali attacks were a predominantly class-based attack, rather than a communal attack on Hindus. It countered the Congress propaganda squarely, arguing that the Hindu press was indulging in dangerous misinformation, which was leading to a charged situation in Bihar. The chaos and disorder in those districts was acknowledged by Naqeeb, however it refrained from publishing any casualty figure, as it considered most of the information coming out of the region to be a gross exaggeration. The Searchlight and its editors were singled out by Muslim newspapers and writers, for their rumour-mongering among the Hindu masses of Bihar. Similarly, the Congress leaders were also accused of doing the same, as they often repeated the data published in these newspapers in their speeches across Bihar in the mournings organised for Noakhali victims in that ominous week before the attacks on Muslims.[267] Naqeeb reported that the Congress leadership of Bengal was already irresponsible, and the Noakhali attacks gave them an opportunity to vilify the Muslims.[268] There were those Congress leaders as well who sincerely believed the news coming out of Bengal. Naqeeb quotes a Congress MLA who was extremely disturbed by the news of massacre of Hindus, and warned the Muslim author in a private conversation that "even though the attacks on Muslims had been averted so far", the recent news from Bengal would definitely lead to such attacks.[269] Such revelations from a

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[267] *Naqeeb*, 15th November, 1946

[268] *Naqeeb*, 15th November, 1946

[269] *Naqeeb*, 15th November , 1946

pro-Congress newspaper are extremely interesting, as they indicate that there was an internal debate among Congressi ranks where there were individuals supporting an attack on Muslims, while others were urging restraint.

Similarly, another Muslim run newspaper Sidq, which was often sympathetic to Congress, took a critical approach towards the Noakhali riots, and the coverage it received by the Hindu press. This newspaper was published from UP, and was run by a famous scholar Abdul Majid Daryabadi. This particular editorial was first published in Qaumi Awaz, which was a pro-Congress Urdu newspaper, and was reprinted by Daryabadi in Sidq. This editorial blamed those newspapers which were either 'Mahasabhai' and 'partially Mahasabhai' for waging a war 'against Muslims' in the garb of fighting communalism. Sidq claims that the Hindus who were not close to Muslims, were most prone to this poisonous propaganda, in which Muslims are presented as inherently communal. It further argued that if such newspapers are given to a well meaning nationalist Hindu on a daily basis, then he would be convinced that all Muslims were violent animals, and eventually that well meaning nationalist Hindu will be transformed into "a communally charged enemy of Congress". [270] It was through slow indoctrination through such organs, it further argued, that the average Hindu was converted into an agent of communal attack. It is interesting to note that even at this point in December, Qaumi Awaz, and in its turn Sidq, are trying to differentiate between Congress and communal forces, a distinction which Naqeeb seemed less confident about, especially after the Bihar attacks. However, the critical tone of all these three Urdu newspapers against the Hindu press is indicative of the fact that there was a tangible crack in the apparent unity of the nationalist media across religious lines.

On the other hand, newspapers critical of Congress, and especially those sympathetic to Muslim League were more vocal in their rejection of misinformation by the

[270] *Sidq*, 20th December, 1946

Congress press. Star of India was one such newspaper being published from Calcutta, while Dawn was another being published from Delhi. Both these newspapers challenged the narrative of the Hindu press, and alleged that the Congress party was out to malign and vilify Muslims in general. While the situation in Noakhali was reported as critical, and phrases like "mob rule" were also employed to describe the attacks, it was also argued that the "Noakhali public was amazed at the fantastic reports published in the Hindu press.".[271][272]

This was a rare and critical juncture as the 'nationalist' Muslim press found itself to be in agreement with the 'communal' Muslim press and there was hardly any local Hindu newspaper which agreed with these two sets of Muslim run newspapers. In this context, the attacks on Muslims occurred in Bihar, which resulted in solidifying this divide further, to the extent that they seemed unbridgeable. The attacks in Bihar started the final volley of conflicting narratives, in which the Muslim press, whether 'nationalist' or 'communal' denounced the apathy of the majority community towards the Muslim cause.

The Coverage of Bihar Attacks

The attacks in Bihar started hardly two weeks after the attacks in Noakhali. As discussed above, during this period the Hindu and Muslim media reacted differently to the conflict. A large section of Hindu press reported this conflict as the long awaited manifestation of the inherently communal mindset of the Muslims and Muslim League. Quite often, for some politicians such as Sardar Patel, Muslims and Muslim League could be used interchangeably.[273] Noakhali was mourned in the newspapers by editors, and on the roads by

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[271] *Dawn*, 17th October, 1946

[272] *Dawn*, 19th October, 1946

[273] *Sidq*, 27th November, 1946

the politicians and their crowds. However, the mourning easily deteriorated into a celebratory function for revenge, and spilling of Muslim blood as discussed in previous chapters. Following the same line of thought, the coverage that these attacks received in the Hindu press was always in the shadow of the far greater coverage of the Muslim atrocities in Bengal.

Through a contrast of these two sets of newspapers, a picture of increasing cleavage along the religious lines can be observed. The local Hindu nationalist press argued that it was the Noakhali attacks in Bengal, and Muslim League frenzy in Bihar which led to unfortunate attacks on the Muslims, while Congress was trying its best to restore peace and order. The Muslim press sympathetic to nationalist cause distanced itself more and more from Congress, and started to question the party's priorities more openly. The divergent tendencies of nationalist Muslim and Hindu press, as evinced during the Noakhali coverage, became sharper in the context of attacks on Muslims in Bihar, as common ground was becoming increasingly difficult to find. Hence, the attacks on Muslims in Bihar was a turning point in the Indian media landscape.

The Hindu Press

From the Hindu side, The Times of India, Searchlight and Aaj have been looked at for the present thesis. The Times of India started covering Bihar attacks on 28th October with a front page reference to the Chapra town killings.[274] On the following days the coverage expanded, as news of further massacres was received from Chapra. On 29th TOI reported that "the disturbances were spreading to rural areas".[275] On 31st it was reported that Chapra was "slowly returning to normal", although many houses were still burning, and "pathetic stories"

[274] *Times of India*, 28th October 1946

[275] *Times of India*, 29th October 1946

were being received from the villages. The local MLA Pandit Girish Tiwari, who had toured the affected villages including Paighamparpur and Khodaibagh narrated heart-rending stories of looting, arson and cold-blooded murders.[276]

As discussed previously, by 31st October, massive rural attacks had started in the country side of Patna district. The first reference to these attacks appeared in TOI on 1st November, when the massacre at Taregna railway station finds mention on its 7th page.[277] By 4th, the Bihar massacres became the main news on the front page, as the title read "Viceroy's talks on Bihar riots: 300 killed in province till date".[278] However, by 4th November, a lot more than 300 villages had already been assaulted according to an official report presented later, and hence an estimate of 300 killed was definitely a gross underestimate.[279] The TOI did not publish such conservative estimates in the case of Noakhali riots, as it quoted exaggerated claims by the Hindu Mahasabha leaders, and compared Noakhali casualties to Calcutta killings on 17th October. Similarly, in the case of Bihar, it published the estimates provided by the Congress party and other Hindu leaders, even if it meant a diametrically opposite editorial policy.

On 5th November, attacks on trains and passengers found mention, and it was reported that many trains had been forced to reroute. It was also mentioned that although Patna town had seen little violence, the situation in the country side was still "serious", and that the violence seemed to be spreading.[280] Thereafter on 6th, another front page article published in TOI informed its readers about Gandhi's threat to the Hindu mobs attacking

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[276] *Times of India*, 31st October 1946

[277] *Times of India*, 1st November 1946

[278] *Times of India*, 4th November 1946

[279] Bihar Legislative Assembly Debates, 13th February 1947

[280] *Times of India*, 5th November 1946

Muslims in Bihar: “End Bihar riots or I fast to death”.[281] On 8th, the casualty figures were put at around 500, and it was argued in the report that “the Government and the people" were determined to “quell the riots”.[282] Hence, it can be seen that although the TOI covered the riots on a daily basis, and Congress government and politicians were covered in a positive light. It was unlike their coverage of Noakhali riots, when the casualties were exaggerated, and the Muslim League, which was incharge of the government was held inept in controlling the riots.

The Searchlight published from Patna published a letter to editor from three Muslim League MLAs (Mazhar Imam, Jafar Imam and Badruddin Ahmad) on 20th October, 5 days before attacks in Chapra started. The letter argued that the the region was unsafe for Muslims, especially those who lived in predominantly Hindu areas, and that Muslim women were being singled out by the Hindu mobs.[283] On 27th, two days after the first attacks, the Searchlight published the news about Chapra. However, this news is flanked by reports about East Bengal, which the general indignation that Biharis were feeling “over Noakhali outrage”.[284] On 28th, the updates about Chapra were published on the second page, where it was reported that 33 persons had been killed so far.[285]

On 30th, it was reported that the violence had spread to rural areas of Saran district, and and killings had started in the eastern town of Bhagalpur as well. However, even this news is overshadowed by the report quoting PM Sinha’s declaration that these attacks are “repercussions of East Bengal”.[286] On 31st, the public was urged to contribute for the victims

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[281] *Times of India*, 6th November 1946

[282] *Times of India*, 8th November 1946

[283] *Searchlight*, 20th October 1946

[284] *Searchlight*, 27th October 1946

[285] *Searchlight*, 28th October 1946

[286] *Searchlight*, 30th October 1946

of East Bengal, and instead of reporting on the attacks on Muslims, it was reported that lethal weapons were being stored in mosques in Bihar.[287] On 1st November, as most of Magadh was burning, Searchlight reported that Muslims have been protected by Hindus in many villages. It also quoted Congress workers who apparently claimed that the Muslim refugees in Patna were not actually refugees, but were gathering in Patna to help the local Muslims. It was also reported that "even though Hindus outnumbered Muslims", the Muslims were "better equipped". [288] On 2nd it was reported that violence had spread to the subdivisions of Barh and Masaurhi, and that violence continued in Bhagalpur. [289]On 3rd first page headline about Bihar attacks was published for the first time, which included PM Sinha's appeal for peace.[290] On 4th it is reported that "riots broke out in Barh".[291] On 5th, a joint appeal for peace by Nehru and Liaqat was published, however, another news informing the readers that a Hindu woman had been recovered from Muslims was also published.[292] On 17th November, SP Mukherjee analysis of the riots was published, where he informed about the four main causes of the riots: the Calcutta killings, the Noakhali attacks, the abduction of Hindu women and the Muslims preparation in Bihar.[293]

It is clear from this account that the Searchlight, considered to be the Congress mouthpiece in the region, was overtly communal in covering the Bihar attacks, as it undermined the sufferings of Bihari Muslims, underestimated the scales of the attacks, misinformed people about the causes of the attacks, and used terms such as 'riots', 'violence'

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[287] *Searchlight*, 31st October 1946

[288] *Searchlight*, 1st November 1946

[289] *Searchlight*, 2nd November 1946

[290] *Searchlight*, 3rd November 1946

[291] *Searchlight*, 4th November 1946

[292] *Searchlight*, 5th November 1946

[293] *Searchlight*, 17th November 1946

and ‘disturbances’ to describe a one-sided attack on Muslims. The Searchlight was published from Patna, situated in Magadh, and in addition to that, Patna district was the most affected district in Bihar. The villages which were being burnt on a daily basis were hardly 10 or 20 miles away from the Searchlight headquarter, and yet this newspaper appears to have a far greater grasp of the Noakhali situation, while it seemed clueless about Patna district. In addition to being clueless, the Searchlight exaggerated the strength of Muslims, and attempted to portray these one-sided attacks as a fair fight between two comparable communities.

Similarly, the Hindi daily Aaj published from Benares, was more concerned about Noakhali than Bihar, which lied in its immediate east, and also contained a large proportion of their readers. It starts with coverage of Chapra in late October, and by 1st it reported that the situation there was improving. The disturbances in Patna rural areas are also reported.[294] On 2nd, the same message about Chapra was reported: “situation has improved”.[295] On 3rd attacks in Taregna railway station, and Masaurhi found mention.[296] On 5th, it was reported that violence had spread in the south western region of Patna district, and more than 400 had perished. However, it was also reported that in many places, Hindus tried to save Muslims, and in many villages houses were burnt after Muslims had been evacuated.

On 6th, an editorial lauding the alertness by the Bihar government is published, which argued that the Bihar government was able to contain the riots in the urban areas. In contrast, Aaj argued, the Bengal government had failed miserably.[297] It was conveniently forgotten by the editor that the one-sided attacks on Hindus happened in the countryside of east Bengal, and except Calcutta, urban centres of Bengal did not witness large riots. Much

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[294] *Aaj*, 1st November 1946

[295] *Aaj*, 2nd November 1946

[296] *Aaj*, 3rd November 1946

[297] *Aaj*, 6th November 1946

like the Searchlight, Aaj wanted its readers to believe that these attacks were not one-sided, because the Muslim places of worship had been converted into storehouses for arms and ammunitions, and because in stead of refugees, the buses were bringing Muslim fighters to Patna to attack Hindus. It was finally on 7th of November, that first article carrying Muslim perspective was published in Aaj, where Bihar Muslim League president Hussain Imam was quoted as putting the estimate of casualties in Patna district at 5000.[298] On 9th, it was reported that 500 Hindus were killed by the police and military firing as a Hindu mob had besieged a village called Nagarnausa in Patna district. However, later this figure was clarified, and it was reported that 15 Hindus were confirmed to be killed in those firings.[299] On 10th, it was reported that a "Muslim" who abducted children had been caught in Gaya.[300] On 13th, the issue of Nagarnausa firing is revisited, as a report told the readers about the police brutality against the Hindus in a situation where Hindus and Muslims were fighting on equal footing.[301] It is clear from the summary presented above, that Aaj played a role similar to the Searchlight, in igniting passions against the Muslims using the exaggerated coverage of Noakhali happenings, and silencing the Muslims during the Bihar attacks. The urge to represent the attacks as a fair fight between two communities was also apparent in the editorial policy of Aaj.

In short, there is a contrast between the way Bihar attacks were covered by the national and local newspapers sympathetic to Congress. Although TOI did published exaggerated figures for Noakhali attacks a couple of times, and did the reverse for Bihar attacks, apparently to save Congress' face and call out ML's failure, it was not overtly

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[298] *Aaj*, 7th November 1946

[299] *Aaj*, 9th November 1946

[300] *Aaj*, 10th November 1946

[301] *Aaj*, 13th November 1946

communal in publishing the reports, and refrained from publishing statistics which had not been verified, and reports which showed one community in a bad light. The two regional mouth pieces of Congress, Aaj and Searchlight, on the other hand were overtly communal during the coverage of Noakhali as well as Bihar attacks. In the case of Noakhali, as mentioned above, the figure of 5000 was published uncritically, and Muslim League was held squarely responsible for the attacks. On the other hand, during the Bihar riots, these newspapers published less about Bihar when compared to Noakhali, and even then mentioned very conservative figures, argued that Muslims were armed and organised, and were about to attack Hindus, and attributed the attacks to Muslim League. However, this contrast between regional and national level on the Hindu side appears to be almost imperceptible, when one looks into the Muslim newspapers, even the nationalist ones, covering the Bihar attacks. From the vantage point of the Muslim newspapers such as Dawn, Star of India, or Naqeeb, the Searchlight and the TOI were guilty of the same major offences: exaggerating Noakhali, and suppressing Bihar.

The Muslim League Press and Bihar

Dawn started covering Bihar attacks by 30th October, when it was reported that hundreds had already been killed in Saran district and Bhagalpur.[302] On 1st November Dawn reports that 2000 had already "perished in Great Bihar Killings".[303] The next day, it was reported that trains as well as stations were attacked. Unlike the Hindu newspapers, Dawn traced the attacks on Muslims in Bihar not to Noakhali, but to attacks on Muslims in the villages of Andhana and Benibad, which happened in September, way before the Noakhali

[302] *Dawn*, 30th October 1946

[303] *Dawn*, 1st November 1946

violence.[304] Through this lineage, it was argued that the Hindus of Bihar did not react to the Noakhali attacks, and were merely using it as a pretext to escalate violence against Muslims which was already happening at a lower scale since September.[305] On 3rd, it was reported that no Muslims were “left alive within 300 square miles" of Magadh.[306] On 5th, a detailed report is published on how trouble started in Chapra on 23rd October, when Hindus used loudspeakers to call a hartal on 25th. During these processions, it was reported, anti Muslim slogans were raised, and by that evening the Jama Masjid was vandalised, and on the next day mobs led mainly by Congress leaders, started attacking Muslims of Chapra.[307] By 7th, Dawn reported that countless had been killed, that the government policy of not firing was responsible for the mass casualties among Muslims.[308]

Similarly, The Star of India was a daily published from Calcutta and was a newspaper sympathetic to Muslim League. As Calcutta is closer to Bihar, and most Muslims from Bihar fled towards Calcutta and Bengal, The Star of India provided us with the most detailed coverage of the Bihar attacks of all the newspapers mentioned so far. It started covering Bihar attacks in 28th, when Chapra killing were mentioned.[309] On 29th, it was reported that violence had spread to rural areas, while on 31st it was reported that about 500 Muslims had been killed in Saran district, and that Muslims were “being wiped out of villages in Bihar”.[310] By 1st November, Star of India, like Dawn, puts the estimate at 2000 killed.[311]

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[304] *Dawn*, 2nd November 1946

[305] *Dawn*, 2nd November 1946

[306] *Dawn*, 3rd November 1946

[307] *Dawn*, 5th November 1946

[308] *Dawn*, 7th November 1946

[309] *Star of India*, 28th October 1946

[310] *Star of India*, 29th October 1946

[311] *Star of India*, 1st November 1946

On 4th it was reported that around 50 inaccessible villages had been affected in Patna district.[312] Even though an ML sympathiser, the Star of India proposes forming ML-Congress coalition governments in all provinces in order to contain communal violence.[313] On 6th, the day after Eid, it was reported that the death toll stood around 13000, with Patna district alone accounting for 8000 deaths. [314] In an editorial published on the same day it was argued that things had to "come to un utterly unspeakable state" before anyone took any notice. It further contrasted the roles played by Bihar and Bengal PMs, and argued that S K Sinha, "PM of that dark God forsaken province", himself took part in inciting the people.[315] On 11th, an interview of Major W R Venning was published in which he claimed that "more than hundred Bihar villages were wiped out". [316] In addition to extensive editorials and interviews, and extensive list of villages in Patna district which were attacked is published.

The Star of India, as well as the Dawn felt vindicated as the Muslim League's stand was proved to be true in their eyes, that Congress rule was synonymous Hindu rule in practice, and that Congress rule in a united India would be intolerable to Muslims. For these newspapers, the Bihar tragedy was a clear cut signal for the Muslims to support the Pakistan plan whole heartedly. It accused the Congress party of planning the attacks in advance, and even referred to their conspiracy of removing Muslims officers and personnels from rural areas.[317] Such allegations were also made by Qudratullah Shahab, an ICS officer in his autobiography.[318] The strict censorship which was enforced by Congress government in Bihar

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[312] *Star of India*, 4th November 1946

[313] *Star of India*, 4th November 1946

[314] *Star of India*, 6th November 1946

[315] *Star of India*, 6th November 1946

[316] *Star of India*, 11th November 1946

[317] *Star of India*, 11th November 1946

[318] Qudratullah Shahab, Shahabnama, Pg 109-127

just a few days before the attacks began, was also cited as an evidence for the partisan role played by the Congress party.[319] The scale of these massive attacks were, to a large extent, accurately represented in these newspapers, and articles dispelling rumours about Muslims being killed in North Bihar or calling for calm in Muslim majority areas were also published.[320]

I quote a few extracts from the editorials published during these days to give a sense of the sentiments expressed by these newspapers against Congress, the Bihari Hindus, and the Bihar government:

"There is no means of communication and there is deliberate suppression of authentic news by local authorities. The whole affair was conducted in a perfectly organised manner. During the day on community will carry on their normal business - plough the fields as nothing happened. At night, they would gather in thousands and with all sorts of arms attack and kill the helpless members of minority community."

"We are informed from reliable sources that a month before the occurrence all the Muslim police officers and constables were removed from the rural areas to the railways, and the high ranking Muslim officers from districts were transferred to provincial secretariats, thus leaving the entire area under the mercy of Hindu officers. .. The general massacre in the six districts of Bihar, where minority community is between five and six percent are not the result of sudden mob frenzy. A careful examination and analysis .. betrays a deep laid plan and preparation for terrorising and ultimately annihilating the minority community by the methods followed by Hitler and his party."[321]

"What has the majority gained by this campaign of extermination? Have they

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[319] *Star of India*, 23rd Octboer and 11th November 1946

[320] *Star of India*, 4th November 1946

[321] *Star of India*, 11th November 1946, Pg 5

succeeded in exterminating the minority? Far from it. They have only wounded it, but activated in the process the internal resources of the wounded organism to grow tougher and withstand better the beasts whom it has for its neighbours... The majority community appeared in their true colours, especially to those Muslims who were outside Muslim League and were worshipping the spurious God of nationalism... Every blow stuck in Bihar has hacked India into Hindustan and Pakistan, and every Muslim must for that reason share the agony of his brethren in Bihar."[322]

The Muslim Nationalists and Bihar

Both the newspapers mentioned above, Dawn and Star of India, were sympathetic to Muslim League, and hence their coverage and analysis of the Bihar attacks, especially attributing the blame to the Congress party can be explained away as prejudiced coverage. However, unlike these newspapers, Naqeeb was a 'nationalist' Urdu newspaper sympathetic to Congress, and was published by Imarat e Shariah which was a major political ally of Congress in the region. In the previous sections, I have discussed the sectarian rhetoric of Naqeeb against Shias and ML, as well as its coverage of Calcutta killings in which it was extremely critical of ML. On the other hand, during the Noakhali attacks, Naqeeb was slightly more cautious, and while it reiterated its condemnation of violence, and ML propaganda, the nationalist Hindu press, especially of Bihar and Bengal was also criticised for its irresponsible coverage, and communal rhetoric against Muslims. As I argued there, it was not Calcutta killings, but the Noakhali attacks which resulted in a visible cleavage between the nationalist press of these two religions. However, this is true only when the electoral politics and the issue of partition are taken into consideration. If we zoom in to the provincial issues, and the

[322] *Star of India*, 12th November 1946, Pg 2

issue of communal attacks, then there were sharp differences between these two nationalist camps from an earlier time.

Firstly, the issue of a strong centre had been a bone of contention between these two camps since the first elections in 1937, but as transfer of power was approaching the debates also intensified. Naqeeb, as well as Jamiat e Ulema e Hind declared during 1946 that their alliance with Congress did not mean that they were ready to give up the safeguards for the minority such as separate electorates, or that a strong centre will be accepted by them. In a telling statement, the Jamiat informed its followers that they wanted neither Akhand Bharat, nor Pakistan; instead they demanded independent provinces, with maximum powers, and in each province Muslims will be organised separately.[323] The Congress' demand for curtailing provincial powers as provided by the Cabinet Mission plan, in favour of a strong centre was rejected by the Jamiat, as well as Naqeeb. It is important to note here that the most important allies of Congress among Muslims did not agree with Congress' vision, and were cheering Cabinet Mission Plan till the very end. The only issue that Naqeeb apparently had with the plan was that Nationalist Muslims were not represented in the cabinet, because Jinnah had vetoed it.[324] These were some issues of national and provincial importance on which the nationalist Muslims could not agree with the nationalist Hindus.

However, what necessitated the idea of safeguards for Muslim community was their relative backwardness, and the insecurity of living in the midst of a volatile Hindu majority. In a minority province like Bihar, the issue of security was directly linked to representation and political agency. Had Congress displayed its resolve to root out communal riots, and provide security to Muslims, a case could have been built in support of abandoning the separate electorates. However, the repeated attacks on Muslims in the province, and

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[323] *Naqeeb*, July 3rd, 1946

[324] *Naqeeb*, July 3rd, 1946

Congress' indifference towards these attacks meant that separate electorates were considered as an important defensive tool by Muslims. The Naqeeb had discussed the issue of communal riots for years, as it claimed that attacks on Muslims happened every year, although on some occasions they got out of government's control. In July 1946, months before the October-November attacks, Naqeeb was discussing the ways to stop communal attacks. It argued for immediate suspension of the officers who had shown negligence or were found to be complicit in the attacks on Muslims.[325] The attack on Muslims in Andhana was reported, where large mob of Hindus attacked a Muslim village in order to "rescue" a Hindu women, who had married a Muslim man many years ago.[326] Naqeeb also argued that Congress' indifference towards communal riots stemmed from the fact that only Muslims suffer losses in the Muslim minority provinces which were being ruled by Congress, and that the only alternative Muslims had was to defend themselves.[327]

The Benibad attacks happened in September, and this was yet another case of an attack by neighbouring Hindus for an unknown woman, about whom they knew nothing. Naqeeb became more critical of Congress and the Hindus. It argued that the Hindus should reform their religion, and raise there girls in a proper way so that they are not attracted towards Islam.[328] On the other hand, Gandhi was criticised for his silence over the Benibad massacre, as Naqeeb reminded its readers that nationalist Muslims had unanimously condemned the Noakhali massacres and the Muslim League on a number of occasions. In the late October issue, when massacres in Chapra had already happened, and attacks in Patna district had just started, Naqeeb complains about the Congress leaders and press that they

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[325] *Naqeeb*, July 20th, 1946

[326] *Naqeeb*, July 20th, 1946

[327] *Naqeeb*, July 20th, 1946

[328] *Naqeeb*, October [2,17,31] 1946

were not taking any notice of these developments. [329]

The next two issues of Naqeeb, published in November and December were dedicated fully to the victims of Bihar, and the coverage of atrocities in Bihar. An incomplete list of villages where attacks happened was also provided.[330] It reported about the total collapse of administration in many districts of Bihar, and that Hindu officers played a partisan role in these developments. It reported that many Hindus had knowledge about the attacks, and yet did nothing to warn the Muslims.[331] The developments since the Calcutta killings were traced in order to show how the Hindu press had been indulging in misinformation and how Muslims had repeatedly warned the Congress leadership in Bihar against an impending disaster, but to no avail.[332]

The Bihar attacks necessitated a visible anti-Congress shift in Naqeeb's rhetoric. For instance, here is a extract from an editorial published on 15th November:

"When Congress got elected to power for the first time (in 1937), it was assumed that the energy which it spent in fighting the previous government will now be spent in bringing about Hindu Muslim unity. However, this proved to be a false assumption. Congress made no such efforts, and followed the British government in its approach. On the other hand, the Hindus felt more empowered. They rightly understood that Congress rule meant that they were inching closer to swaraj. They considered Congress ministers to be their ministers, and assumed that they will help the Hindus in their fight against Muslims. The Congress also did nothing to contradict this belief. When Congress assumed power for a second time in 1946, it was done in the context of complete polarisation, when most Muslims had voted for Muslim

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[329] *Naqeeb*, October [2,17,31] 1946

[330] *Naqeeb*, Novermber and December 1946

[331] *Naqeeb*, November 15, 1946

[332] *Naqeeb*, December 1946

League. This increased the confidence of Hindus manifold, as they came to believe that Congress could rule without Muslim support. As there was no active front left against the British, all the organisational efforts against the British were redirected against the Muslims."[333]

The tone of this nationalist newspaper had become visibly anti-Congress by now, as it accused Congress of not only taking part in the attacks against the Muslims, but also of providing the overwhelming organisational strength to the Hindus of Bihar during the attacks. This was not a small charge, and showed the disillusionment that had set in the nationalist Muslims ranks after the Bihar debacle. This disillusionment is further evidenced by the fact that a term such as "free-thinking Muslims" comes into vogue in the Muslim press during these crucial months of Indian history. Not only, Naqeeb, but other nationalist newspapers such as Sidq and Qaumi Awaz start using this term to denote the Muslims who called themselves nationalist but were trying to distance themselves from Congress, especially after its allegedly heinous role in the Bihar attacks.

Sidq, published from United Provinces, also covered the Bihar attacks to a large extent. It frequently borrowed articles from various Urdu newspapers, and hence provided a range of opinion from Muslim media. Although before the attacks on Muslims, this newspaper took a sympathetic approach towards Congress, the tone of the newspaper changed radically after the Bihar attacks. An article titled "Congress in the eyes of its own people", was borrowed from nationalist Qaumi Awaz, in which a Muslim nationalist declared that "fascist mentality" has creeped into Congress, and it is time to "cut these parts off". The writer further argued that the reason for this tendency was that Congress cadre had not been politically trained in an organised manner, while in contrast the Communists circle had been

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[333] *Naqeeb*, 15th November, 1946

trained in a better way, and hence they were not affected by the propaganda.[334] Another article titled "The demand of Nationalists Muslims from Congress" borrowed from Urdu newspaper Payam, it was pointed out that the Congress government had so far failed to set up an impartial investigation team to look into the attacks on Muslims. It further argued that most of the Hindu leaders of Congress want us to 'forget and forgive', a phrase which was attributed to PM S K Sinha by many newspapers. The author also reminded Congress that Jamiat e Ulema was the most nationalist Muslim voice in the nation.[335]

In an editorial penned by Maulana Shah Abdul Bari, it was declared that even nationalism could not secure peace for Muslims, as Muslims office bearers of the Congress party were also massacred with impunity.[336] In another editorial borrowed from newspaper Medina, it was argued that the primary job of the nationalist Muslims was not to oppose Muslim League, but to contain the unprecedented bloodshed of Muslims in the minority provinces.[337] In another article, Sidq made fun of a statement allegedly by the Congress-backed PM of Frontier province, in which he declared that the leaders of ML in Peshawar were either heretical Qadianis or Shias, as Jinnah was himself a Shia.[338] In another article borrowed from Medina, it was reported that Hindustan Times had wrongly claimed that the nationalist Muslims had arranged a meeting to form a united front against Muslim League. The article clarified that League's name was not even mentioned in the meeting, and that nationalist Muslims had a shift in perspective because of the recent events, and they were not sticking to their pre-election state of mind anymore.[339] There were many such direct and

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[334] *Sidq*, 27th November, 1946

[335] *Sidq*, 10th January, 1947

[336] *Siqd*, 21st February, 1947

[337] *Sidq*, 21st February, 1947

[338] *Sidq*, 7th March, 1947

[339] *Sidq*, 21st February, 1947

indirect references, which were gleaned from many nationalist newspapers across north India, and published by Sidq to reflect the shift in the priorities of nationalist Muslims.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to deconstruct the 'nationalist' category, using the newspapers of various sides such as Hindu-nationalist, Muslim-nationalist and Muslim League. The ‘Hindu-nationalist’ side aligned with the so-called Hindu-communal rhetoric in case of Hindu-Muslim riots, and especially during the Noakhali riots it indulged in exaggeration and rumour-mongering, which led to deterioration of situation in Bihar. Similarly, during the Bihar attacks, the Hindu-nationalist press was largely silent and suppressed the news about the scale of the attack, and in fact tried to portray it as a fair battle between two communities.

On the other hand, I have tried to show that the Muslim nationalists and their media outlets had significant points of disagreements, even during their election coalition, especially in Bihar. The disagreements were about important issues such as federalism, separate electorates, safeguards to minorities etc. Despite these differences, till the Calcutta killings, there was a general united front against Muslim League, as both Hindu and Muslim nationalists criticised ML for the violence. It is interesting to note that in this case as well as during the Noakhali attacks initially, the Muslim-nationalist did not align with the Muslim-communalist, unlike Hindu-nationalist which aligned with Hindu-communalist rhetoric during both Calcutta and Noakhali. However after the Bihar attacks, there was a decisive shift away from Congress and it's narrative, as Hindu newspapers were declared communal and anti-muslim by many Muslim-nationalist newspapers. The transformation brought about by Bihar attacks led to a closer alignment of the rhetoric of Muslim League backed press and

the nationalist Muslim backed press. It further strengthened the claim which was repeated frequently by the ML press that Congress was a Hindu party, and that Muslims should refrain from worshipping this 'spurious god of nationalism'.[340]

[340] The Star of India, 12th November 1946, Pg 2

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The story of partition in Bihar has been explored from various vantage points and using various sources as shown in the discussion above. However, on the level of all-India analysis, the factoring in of the Bihar case has not yet been achieved, as most of the works take UP as the representative case of a Urdu speaking minority province. This lacuna needed to be filled in with sufficient focus on the build up to the polarisation of 1946, the narratives emerging from the massive riots of 1946 and the conditions of post-1946 Bihar, and how the processes that led to crystallisation of Bihari Muslim/Hindu identity were similar or different from the other parts of the subcontinent. For instance, the case of Urdu in Bihar is different from other provinces. Unlike Punjab and UP, Urdu had lost its primary position as the official language around the turn of the 19th century, and by the time of mass political upheavals it had been reduced to a minority language, associated primarily with Muslims. Hence, the defence of Urdu in the last two decades of colonial era is worded differently in Bihar.

Similarly, as Sajjad points out, the early association of educated Muslims and Congress in Bihar is in contrast with the developments in UP as well as Punjab. The pro-Congress Muslim political formations, especially Muslim Independent Party and Momin Conference, the former supported by Imarat-i-Shariah, a religious and legal institution while the latter supported by many *Pasmanda* Muslims across Bihar, demonstrate the viability of these political forces, and the complex terrain of what one cannot classify simply as 'elite Muslim politics' in Bihar. More importantly, the Congress allies themselves insist on the rights of cultural and religious autonomy, to the extent that it mirrors the 'positive communalism' of early days of nationalism. The new questions raised by the Bihar experience

is going to challenge our current understanding of communalism, nationalism and the eventual 'Muslim separatism'.

On the regional level, Pandey's work has shown the interconnections within a linguistic region such as Bhojpur in the context of cow protection movement, the riots of 1917 etc, which were agnostic to the administrative boundaries. Similarly, the Muslims of Bihar were a diverse community, speaking many dialects, whether a landlord or a weaver (along with his neighbours), attached to this *pir*, or attending that mosque, or if educated, reading particular newspapers. Their relations and connections with the Muslim communities to the east in Bengal as well as to the west in UP need to be further explored to shed light on the dynamics of 'Muslim' identity as it comes to be seen in first half of 20th century in the context of reform movements, rising Urdu print culture and the conflicts unfolding in the subcontinent. For instance, the effect on Shia-Sunni conflicts of the mobilisation of Muslims based on a problematic Sunni symbol of Khilafat has only recently been raised. Similarly, the internal caste/class divide is equally significant for the studying the community formation in Bihari Muslims. To what extent were the 'primordial' features responsible for the community identity of Muslims, was it stronger, as Pandey hints, than any such 'primordial' similarities shared by the vast Hindu community?[341]

Besides the 'primordial' features, what was the role of and reaction to the major communal riots in Bihar in the first half of 20th century, from 1917 to 1946-7 and beyond. The patterns of internal or external migration, of land and property alienation and of decline in educational and employment opportunities should be explored to further enrich the narrative of partition and polarization in Bihar.

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[341] Gyanendra Pandey, '*The Construction of Communalism*', Chapter 6

Rural Attacks

Hindu Muslim riots in India seem to be concentrated in cities and towns as is apparent from the high frequency of urban riots. Paul Brass and Asghar Ali Engineer have studied many cities and towns where such incidents occur with highest frequency, collecting data over decades. Ashutosh Varshney has also used reports from The Times of India over many decades to describe the riots in the most violence-prone cities in India. The effectiveness of riot control measures such as curfew can be tested, and in the case of Brass, institutionalised rioting systems can be detected in most riot prone towns in India through such studies. However, the 2013 communal violence of Muzaffarnagar have, once again, brought to our attention the phenomenon of rural 'riots', where preventive tools such as curfew are impossible to implement, and where the ratio of policemen to the people and the area of the region is very low when compared to the relevant urban figures, and where the documentation and knowledge about the terrain is limited. Hence even though the official death toll in these disturbances was put around 60, both the migration induced by this violence, as around 60,000 people left their villages to seek refuge in neighbouring villages and towns and the political effect of the riots in the next general elections were disproportionate. Muslims were evacuated out of many Hindu dominated villages, and land loss is an important resultant of this process.

It is the nature and consequences of such violence that Brass refuses to call them riots, which according to him, by definition means the sudden outbreak of violent conflict between two mobs, a situation which seems to be more probable in the urban spaces, constrained as they are by the higher densities of population and lack of resources. What happened in rural Muzaffarnagar seems to be a planned eviction of Muslims on an unprecedented scale, and hence cannot be called a riot. Pogroms, which means targeted massacre and persecution of a community, seems to be a more apt term. Such pogroms seem

to have the silent consent of a significant proportion of the majority population in the region, and hence the staggering scales of migration. The sustenance of rumours against the targeted community using articles, speeches and word of mouth is also crucial during these pogroms. In Muzaffarnagar too, rumours played an extremely critical role, as the violence in the countryside started almost 10 days after the incident termed as the cause of the riots took place, and these ten days should be seen as the incubation period during which time the rumours prepared a solid base for violence against Muslims. The vernacular press and mass media played an important role in spreading the rumours to the countryside. The inability of the government apparatus in preventing the spreading of the rumours, as well as in controlling the violence in the rural areas led to the mass migration in the region. This reappearance of rural riots in a significant way raises questions regarding our understanding of their causes, mechanisms and effective measures for their control.

The first implication emerges from the study of rural pogroms is that the simplistic model which seeks to explain urban riots in terms of sectional elite manipulation and irresponsible officers breaks down. The scale of the mob, which is reported to be above 10000 in multiple cases, cannot be explained as some communal elements of the neighbourhood which have attacked, rather it is the whole of neighbourhood (or *jawaar*) which has besieged the minority population. The historiographical concentration on the urban riots as the representative sites of conflict between the two communities has led to the emergence of distinct theoretical groups: one of an inactive, indifferent or secular individuals, while the other of attacking, prejudiced and communal individuals. However, this classification seems irrelevant in the case of rural attacks, where an overwhelming number of common individuals are involved in the attack. Varshney's proposed solution of increased civic contacts, or increased economic interdependence also seems to be less effective in the rural setting, especially when the neighbours during a pogrom are trying to eliminate and take over the land, thereby ending the economic dependance once and for all. The rural riots are

not infrequent just because of the greater civic interaction between the Hindus and Muslims in rural settings. The seasonal timing of the attacks, the massive participation which in turn reflects the scale of organisation and propaganda: all of these suggest that the massive rural pogroms happen when a number of factors coincide.

The second aspect of the rural attacks is the seasonal and political timing within which such attacks are made operational. All the three massive rural attacks on the Muslims of Bihar in the twentieth century were carried out after monsoon and before the harvesting of paddy. The rural sites of Bihar were thoroughly flooded rendering large areas inaccessible by road or railways. It also makes sure that the state apparatus remains cut off from the areas when additional assistance is required as was the case in the situation of communal attacks. Hence, the administration in Bihar remained incapacitated to reach for the rescue and protection of the Muslim community which were under massive communal attack by, their counterpart, majority community. Two attacks of 1917 and 1946 coincided with Baqr-Id as well when the religious performance of sacrifice on the occasion of Eid is cashed upon by the rumour and hate mongers to incite violence against the muslims, in the name of cow-protection. It is every thirty years that Baqr-Id falls in this bracket between Monsoon and Winter and so has been two attacks difference of duration which is not co-incidental.

The political timing of the rural attacks are also very crucial to the understanding of the nature and form of the violence. 1917, 1946 and 1989 are all years of significant upheavals in international and national politics. In 1917, world war one was raging on in Europe and the resulting inflation had affected the poorer provinces of British India which led to agrarian unrest. The Home Rule movement was at its peak as congress was mobilising Indians to demand greater autonomy from the British Rule. In 1946, the second world war had just ended and inflation had led to massive food crisis which led to starvation and deaths in Bihar and Bengal. The war years saw increasing agrarian unrest as militant activities of peasants against landlords multiplied manifold. In addition to this the freedom movement had

mobilised a large section of Hindus under the banner of congress. In 1989, as the cold war was coming to an end, Indian economy was struggling to sustain itself which resulted in further market liberalisation. During the same time-period, the lower caste alliances defeated the congress party in Bihar which represented the upper caste interests. The lower caste movements were electoral as well as militant and Bihar witnessed decades of caste and class violence starting in 1980s. It is in these contexts at every junction that the attacks on Muslims have taken place in rural Bihar. The reason being that the international influence leads to increasing confrontation among the rural economic classes and the common balancing action in all three these events has been to divert the tension within the economic class towards the communal divisions. The congress which always attempted to maintain the status quo by remaining equidistant from the landlords and militant peasants was not meant to be neutral but allow a silent support to the acts of violence against muslims so that the upper caste and class population is saved from the wrath of the militant peasants. This is also referred to by Vinita Damodaran in the context of 1946 communal violence of Bihar.

The confessional Press

The newspapers of the late colonial times in India appear more as mouth pieces of various political parties rather than impartial and unprejudiced reportage. The editorial policy of the newspaper can be deconstructed based on political and religious affiliation of its owners in context of the content that those newspapers would publish. The publishing of exaggerated reports uncritically if it harms the opposing camp, is the hallmark of journalism in late colonial times. Similarly, newspapers such as ‘Searchlight’ would leave no stone unturned in defending the congress party and the Hindu community of Bihar. The choice of words is always interesting and representative of the biases of the writer and publisher. If the people of the community of a publisher were the victims of any violence, then the situation

would be described as ‘GundaRaj, Massacre, Anarchy,’ etc. And if the people of the other community to which publisher or reporter did not belong to, were victims of violence, then terms such as ‘Disturbance, Tension, Affected Areas, etc’ would be used.

Another aspect which gets revealed through an analysis of the newspapers owned by Muslims is the heterogeneous and diverse political attitudes of the Muslims in late colonial India. Instead of using the Congress-ML binary, these newspapers reflected the aspirations and demands of their parties and their readers and engaged with both ML and congress on an issue by issue basis. This analysis leads to dismissal of linear narrative of partition where Muslims identified as ‘secular Muslims’ and ‘Communal Muslims’ were at odds with each other.

Muslim Politics

Another implication emerges from a review of the Urdu sources. Even if we put aside the camps opposing the Congress, the institutes and political figures sympathetic to Congress also posed demands which were problematic for the mainstream Congress figures. For instance, the Imarat affiliated MIP was not ready to compromise on federalism or separate electorate, even though it fought the elections with Congress. In other words, the only issue which separates the Congress Muslims from ML is that of partitioning the subcontinent. As mentioned above, the Imarat, which is the largest religious institute of the region, also uses the sectarian card to discredit ML, and explicitly calls it a Shia organisation which would, because of its sectarian nature, work against the interests of the larger Sunni community. It reflects the same majoritarian mentality: the ML is a Shia party, Shias are not true Muslims, is similar to the ML is a Muslim party, Muslims are not true nationalists. In this context, the attacks on Muslims in 1946 further complicates the matter, with the Muslims who opposed ML distancing themselves from Congress. The Imarat had to remind Congress that

combatting Muslim "communalism" was not the primary duty of Muslims. In fact, their first and foremost duty was to stop the bleeding of the Muslims in Bihar. A term "free thinking" Muslims comes into use in some Urdu newspaper during this period, which refers to the Congress-allied Muslim section which is now suspicious of Congress and its brand of nationalism.

Both these issues are linked to the definition of 'communal' and 'secular', and a closer look at the rural pogroms, and its effect on the 'secular'/'communal' divide among the Muslims as well as the Hindus is what I seek to achieve through this study. For instance, in the rural pogroms, the "communal" is no longer a section of the people, but the entire people themselves, including the Congress party, are directly and openly communal in the eyes of the minority group. On the other hand, among the Muslims, the difference between 'secular/ nationalist' and 'communal' is weakened by this pogroms, with many 'nationalists' newspapers and politicians trying to distance themselves from Congress, some of them even embraced ML. This blurring of difference between the communal and the secular in both the religious communities was made easy by the fact that there was no fundamental difference between their aspirations. On the issues of separate electorates or of centralisation, the 'secular' yet sectarian Imarat was with 'communal' ML, while the secular Congressmen will be in agreement with the 'communal' Hindus.

Another aspect which comes out of the study of 1946 Bihar is the ambiguous idea of Pakistan as understood by Bihari Muslims. During the elections, many Muslims did not understand Pakistan as a far away land to which they would have to migrate. The slogan was used as a short hand for Muslim self-determination, even though the details were not clear for the masses. It is only with these massive attacks, that the idea of Pakistan became clear in the mind of Bihari Muslims. Migration to Sindh and Bengal in 1946 meant migration to Pakistan where Muslims could be secure. Some Muslims wanted Pakistan in Bihar itself, and demanded the partition of Bihar. This was the idea of Pakistan in Bihar as late as 1947.

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